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A Comparative Study of the Death of Authority and the Loss of Self in Postmodern Literature

by

Krista Polley

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Abstract

A Comparative Study of the Death of Authority and the Loss of Self in Postmodern Literature

The themes of the death of authority and the loss of self are portrayed in postmodern world literature. Through five culturally specific novels, both the theme of the death of authority and the resulting idea of the loss of self are explored. Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Jerzy Kosinski, Milan Kundera, J. M. Coetzee, and Haruki Murakami provide the novels, each of which presents the postmodern individual living in the world with no sense of authority and no sense of self. These individuals abandon their cultural and social roles in the attempt to find themselves. The individual's situation is understood through the radical theology of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Altizer and its relationship to the deconstruction of Derrida and Barthes.

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Introduction

> "[The] concept of God that man professes to worship is mechanical and idolatrous. No longer sustained as of old, by the traditional theistic faith, the character of man is badly split. If he turns to God it is not with instinctive faith but with a frightened, compulsive longing for security. Thus he leads a double, alienated life."[1]

The postmodern novel is a confrontation of the modern man with the realization of his own insignificance. His God has disappeared. He is uncertain of the world and of his self. The character in contemporary literature is affected by the theme of the death of authority. An analysis of five culturally distinct novels shows that an individuality exists both cross-culturally and despairingly. The characters in the novels are uncertain of truth in the world and within their selves. They separate themselves from the crowd of their societies in an attempt to understand who they are, and they consequently destabilize the cultural structures to which they belong. They are very much aware of their society's expectations, but they must abandon their cultural roles in order to find themselves. They become postmodern. The characters are subject to the death of authority through the themes of the death of God and the death of the author.

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[1] Charles Glicksberg, Modern Literature and the Death of God (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966) 36.

The contemporary Western theme of the death of authority has affected the literary character in such a manner that he has a problem with understanding his own identity. Where the modern character is consumed with his search for meaning, the postmodern character is absorbed in his search for identity. Through a comparative study of the characters in five culturally specific, yet arguably Western, novels, I will show that the contemporary novel is concerned with the character who intently seeks his own identity in a world that no longer holds any determinate meaning or authority. It is due to the theme of the death of authority that the character is left alone. This is presented through literary characters, each with either multiple identities or an incomplete identity, that attempt to find closure and finality to what can be extracted from their meaningless interactions with the world. Part I of this study, which presents the Western themes of the death of God and the death of the author, is devoted to the historical backgrounds of the theological and theoretical themes of the death of authority. This section presents historical information on the themes that are apparent in and link together the novels. The characters can be understood in terms of the idea of the loss of self through an understanding of the culmination of these themes and their effects on the characters. It is through the idea of the loss of self that the individual's loss of authority is actualized.

The traditional Western concept of authority relies on a belief in God as omniscient, omnipotent, and omni benevolent. Philosophers have debated the God of three omnis through the question of evil, and various concepts have been suggested that allow for the Father to exist concurrently with evil. While these debates are very relevant to the concept of God and of God's existence, they are not directly related to the issues

with which we will presently be dealing. We are concerned not with the irreconcilability of God, good, and evil, but with the theme of God's death. Soren Kierkegaard (Kierkegaard 1946) begins our analysis with his concern with the practice of Christianity and its undeniable difference from the Christianity of the New Testament. His arguments consider what the public believes they believe in and what they actually believe in. Friedrich Nietzsche (Nietzsche 1974) further criticizes modern Christianity through his proclamation that God is dead. Christendom treats God objectively and fails to recognize that it is through this treatment that God has died. Thomas Altizer (Altizer 1966) posits a radical theology, where the death of God is implemented into contemporary Christianity. The concept of God becomes the theme of a God that has died in our time. The progression of this theme provides a basis for its understanding as it exists today and as it affects our identities and the identities of contemporary literary characters.

Theoretically, the theme of the death of God can be examined through the theme of the death of the author. Both deaths release the individual into the world alone. The loss of authority in literature gives the novel and the characters in the novel impermanence – their meanings are unstable and therefore only exist for the moment, for that precise instant of reading, through the reader's experiences at that time. Meaning no longer exists, and closure can no longer be established. Deconstruction appropriately links the theme of the death of God to the idea of the loss of self through the theme of the death of the author. In the following analysis, the deconstruction of Jacques Derrida (Derrida 1986) and Roland Barthes (Barthes 2001) provides the theoretical background to the theme of the death of the author. While both the theme and the theorists are deeply

theoretical, the textual analysis is based on an understanding of the theme that has emerged from the literary theory and is not modelled on deconstructive or poststructuralist methods of analysis.

Mark C. Taylor (Taylor 1982) provides an interesting examination of the effects on the self of the death of the (A)author by linking the theology and the theory with the postmodern individual. Similar to Altizer, Taylor proposes a radical Christology in which the individual, or the group of individuals, can maintain and progressively promote a Christianity that incorporates God's death into its teachings. His examination of the disappearance of the self in a world that is recognized as meaningless establishes a means of treating and understanding the characters in the textual analysis of Part II. His union of the theology, the theory, and the self is useful for this study simply in terms of establishing a connection between the themes and ideas to the novels.

Part I of this study is devoted to the theological and theoretical backgrounds which comprise the nature of the death of authority. Part II, while it is dependent upon these backgrounds, is dependent upon them only insofar as background information. The death of the author emerges from deconstruction. Thus, for our purposes, we will be familiar with deconstruction. We will not, however, deconstruct the novels in our attempt to understand the effects of the theme on the character.

Although centuries separate them, Kierkegaard (Kierkegaard 1946) and Charles Glicksberg (Glicksberg 1963) both recognize that the individual, who may very well *feel* properly religious, is performing religion rather than practising religion. God is safe. He offers comfort when we feel despair. The tendencies of many contemporary Christians are

simple imitations of traditional Christianity. The individual splits his own identity through his religious circumstance. Where religion should provide fulfilment, it here provides only a further disconnect between individual and self. Thus, the modern self is faced with: "the depersonalization of man, his alienated condition, his oppressive vision of the absurd."[2] The postmodern self faces these events with no concept of his own identity. He is inexplicable and meaningless and faces a world that is similarly inexplicable and meaningless. Man must learn to create himself in a world that has lost its authority. Man, like the literary text, has no centre, and he is consequently unknowable. The literature of the 20th Century presents the contemporary search for meaning. This search begins with the question, "Who am I?" and leads to, "What am I supposed to do?" As he searches for his place in the world, he recognizes that there is the crowd and there is the individual. He cannot conform to the crowd because it has no direction. He feels within himself the will to be, but in order to accomplish this, he must leave the structure that his role supports. He does not abandon the world entirely. Rather, he abandons the structures that can no longer sustain his tradition. The past must be recognized in the present, but it cannot live in the present. This problem will be examined in the following novels, each of which provides the reader with characters who have either multiple or incomplete identities and who attempt to find closure in a world where meaning does not exist.

Part II of this study presents the analysis of five novels. Each novel represents a

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[2] Charles Glicksberg, The Self in Modern Literature (University Park, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1963b) 185.

particular culture, but each is approached through a distinctly Western perspective. The postmodern individual is presented, in all five novels, as uncertain of his own identity as well as the identities of those around him. This study is male-centred, as are the traditions from which the novels originate. Each novel is studied, whether in translation or in its original, in English. I present myself as a product of the traditional Western male-dominated Christian world. In so doing, I provide a perspective that is common to the background that forms the basis of this study. While the novels, plot-wise, have little in common with each other, each does deal with the questioning of identity and is authored by a prominent contemporary male author.

Each of the following novels presents characters whose traditional cultural roles are destabilized, thereby de-structuring the norms and expectations to which they are accustomed. The characters are consequently forced to attempt to reconcile their external selves, which continue to attempt to conform to their cultural expectations, with their internal selves, which have become distinctly postmodern through the loss of traditional elements. Gabriel Garcia Marquez' Chronicle of a Death Foretold (1982) considers the death of Santiago Nasar through the recollections of a variety of the people who witnessed and played a part in his brutal stabbing. Jerzy Kosinski's Pinball (1982) examines the intersection of four characters and the identities of each through the perceptions of each other. Milan Kundera's Immortality (1991) examines authorial absence through the authorial attempt to create a character that ultimately creates itself. Boyhood (1997) addresses time as it alters J. M. Coetzee's role as character, narrator, and author. Haruki Murakami's The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle (1997) questions the ability to

understand another's identity through the attempt to understand one's own identity. Each text clearly presents the theme of the absence of authority and the idea of the indeterminacy of identity as confirmation of the absence of closure.

Part I

1.1

God is Dead

The origins of God's disappearance can be traced through several hundred years and various philosophers and theologians. This particular study demands a general understanding of the origins of God's disappearance and of its effects on the society from which He has disappeared. We will begin with Kierkegaard's (1946a) problem with Christendom. Nietzsche's (1974) proclamation of the death of God will follow, and we will finish this section with the radical theology of Thomas Altizer (1966). One issue exists as the basis for each of these authors' arguments – the popularization of a religion that has lost it traditional principles. Although Christianity does still exist today, it does not conform to the traditional elements of the New Testament. It has suffered a crisis, and it must now accommodate certain changes in order to continue as a tradition. Kierkegaard (1946b) examines the differences between objective and subjective faith and considers the relationship between the individual and God. Nietzsche presents the madman to provide an account of God's death and an examination of humanity's responsibility for his death. Heidegger's (1977) analysis of Nietzsche's madman offers an introduction to the existentialism that replaces God. Altizer provides insight into a working theistic approach to a God-less Christianity as a natural reaction to the crisis of Christianity. Our purpose in this section is to examine Christendom as it exists today in relation to classical Christianity. The theological discussions consider contemporary Christianity's non-

conformance to its tradition. God and meaning have been replaced by nothing, and this nothing plays a major role in the life of modern and postmodern individuals. The death of authority leaves the individual alone in a world of absence. This absence is frequently encountered in contemporary life and literature and must be considered historically.

Kierkegaard, in his study "The Attack Upon Christendom," (1946a) recognizes a growing problem within Christendom. He presents Abraham as an example. Abraham is asked by God, as a test of faith, to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, for whom Abraham naturally feels great affection and whom he loves dearly. Through his love and faith in God and his unyielding trust in God, Abraham prepares to sacrifice his son. He is able to do so, according to Kierkegaard, only through a suspension of the ethical. His true faith separates him from others. God does not allow for Isaac to be killed, however. Both He and Abraham have experienced Abraham's ability to reach the religious level of his existence. It is in this lever that his self can be fully expressed in its contact with God. Kierkegaard presents three levels to man's existence: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. To religious level can only be reached through a 'leap of faith', which is exemplified through Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son for God. It exists on a purely subjective level, where the individual and God are in contact. Kierkegaard claims that Christendom exists primarily on the aesthetic or the ethical levels and no longer bears witness to the religious level. While the ethical level conforms to the principal teachings of the Old and the New Testament, the religious level is the only level that provides a subjective relationship with God. Christianity consequently functions in an entirely objective manner.

Kierkegaard's "Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the 'Philosophical Fragments' " (1946b) considers the loss of subjectivity and the increase of objectivity in Christendom. He comments on the task of becoming subjective in the self's relation to God: "The existing individual who chooses to pursue the objective way enters upon the entire approximation-process by which it is proposed to bring God to light objectively. But this is in all eternity impossible, because God is a subject, and therefore exists only for subjectivity and inwardness."[3] God can therefore exist only on a wholly religious level. Reaching this level, however, is not an easy task. The aesthetic, the ethical, and the logical must be dismissed in order for the individual to reach the religious. The individual must take a 'leap of faith'; he leaves one reality, the reality with which he is familiar, and he hopes to find God, subjectively, and his self. Popular Christianity demands the subject's appropriation and acceptance of established doctrines. However, it is the manner in which the subject accepts the truth of Christianity that determines whether Christianity has actually been accepted. Kierkegaard writes, "the subjective acceptance is precisely the decisive factor; and an objective acceptance of Christianity is paganism or thoughtlessness."[4] It is only through a subjective acceptance that Christianity can be Christianity, which is the Christianity of the New Testament. According to Kierkegaard, "objectively, Christianity has absolutely no existence,"[5] and by this he means that

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[3] Soren Kierkegaard, "Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the 'Philosophical Fragments'." trans. Walter Lowrie, A Kierkegaard Anthology, ed. Robert Bretall (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1946b). 211

[4] Kierkegaard, Postscript 207.

[5] Kierkegaard, Postscript 208.

Christianity exists through God and that God's existence can only be known as a subject.

In "Attack Upon Christendom," Kierkegaard distinguishes between the spiritual man, or the Christian of the New Testament, and the man of contemporary Christendom. He states,

> the Christianity of 'Christendom,' takes this into account: it takes away from Christianity the offense, the paradox, etc., and instead of that introduces probability, plainly comprehensible. That is, it transforms Christianity into something entirely different from what it is in the New Testament, yea, into exactly the opposite; and that is the Christianity of "Christendom," of us men.[6]

The Christianity of the New Testament demands a belief in the simultaneous existence of God in human form, as Jesus Christ, and as the eternal, as God. God must be believed to have existed in the finite and the infinite at the same time. In order to reach the religious level, one must be able to fully believe that God existed both in the world and beyond the world simultaneously. The Christianity of Christendom, however, requests several hours on Sunday mornings and several minutes of prayer before dinner and sleep. The Christianity of Christendom simplifies itself for the masses. It allows for a much larger congregation, but it is a significantly less knowledgeable congregation in regards to Christian history and teachings. Kierkegaard does not find an absence where he should find God. Rather, he finds an absence where he should find devotion. He presents the

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[6] Soren Kierkegaard, "The Attack Upon Christendom," trans. Walter Lowrie, A Kierkegaard Anthology, ed. Robert Bretall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946a) 445.

problem within Christendom in its dishonest devotion. His issues are further developed through Nietzsche's less theistic, but equally as troubling, proclamation that "God is dead." Nietzsche's thought builds from Kierkegaard's, but it also brings forth a louder and more insistent demand for a reconsideration of God by the public. While Kierkegaard does not state that Christianity's authority is dead, he does present an irremediable absence within non-classical Christendom.

Nietzsche's madman demands attention from the people in regards to the state of God,

> 'Whither is God?' he cried. 'I shall tell you. We *have killed him* – you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained the earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is night not continually closing on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods. too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.
>
> 'How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What

> was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: Who will wipe the blood off us? [...] What are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?'[7]

Nietzsche prophesies, through the character of a madman, the impending recognition of the disappearance of Christianity's authority, which is a result of the objective nature of religiosity. The Gay Science (1974) presents the prophetic madman in Book Three, section 125, "The Madman" as he who has come to the realization and proclaims, "God is dead." Unlike Kierkegaard, Nietzsche does not see Christendom as simply no longer conforming to the subjectivity expressed in the New Testament. Rather, Nietzsche finds the Christian God to be completely absent. He is dead, and he has been murdered. The passage presents an introduction to the concept not of a skewed system of belief, where the devout are devoid of proper religiosity, but, rather, of a belief that has extinguished its own God. Not only has God died, but it is the public, "we," who have murdered him. The madman states that he has come too early and that the people are not ready to understand the effects of such a death. Nietzsche's prophetic words, as stated through the character of the madman, give his text the possibility for a number of interpretations. The "madman" can be understood to be insane and incoherent or even prophetic and intuitive beyond our understanding. How do we interpret Nietzsche's madman? Perhaps we should simply focus on WHAT he is saying: "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed

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[7] Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage Books, 1974) 181-182.

him."[8] While Kierkegaard considers the self's ability to reach God, Nietzsche considers the treatment of God by individuals who not only do not notice his absence, but are also the cause for this absence. Nietzsche presents this madman as proclaiming what has happened, but still, " 'I have come too early,' he said, 'my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. [...] This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars – *and yet they have done it themselves*.' "[9] Nietzsche provides a warning to the people, a warning that goes beyond Kierkegaard's problem with Christendom.

Martin Heidegger presents an examination of Nietzsche's statement that God is dead in his text "The Word of Nietzsche" from The Question Concerning Technology (1977). The essence of nihilism is, according to Heidegger, attributed in part to the words of Nietzsche, for the death of God leaves the individual in nothingness. In response to the madman's prophesy, Heidegger states,

> If God as the suprasensory ground and goal of all reality is dead, if the suprasensory world of the Ideas has suffered the loss of its obligatory and above all its vitalizing and upbuilding power, then nothing more remains to which man can cling and by which he can orient himself. That is why in the passage just cited there stands this question: 'Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing?' The pronouncement ' God is dead' contains the confirmation that this Nothing is spreading out. 'Nothing' means here:

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[8]Nietzsche, Gay Science 182.

[9] Nietzsche, Gay Science 182.

absence of a suprasensory, obligatory world. Nihilism, 'the most uncanny of all guests,' is standing at the door.[10] 61-62

Heidegger's comments carry the individual's relationship with God to a level where the absence of God leads to a communion with the remaining eternal truth: the existence of nothing. Thus, the individual who lives without God is the individual who lives alone, in nothing and for nothing. God has traditionally existed as the meaning and the essence within and beyond life. His death does not only take his presence away from us, it takes meaning itself. While Nietzsche does not proclaim through theism, both he and Kierkegaard express the absence within the Christianity of Christendom and the void that replaces the essence that was, through classical Christianity, the religious authority of the believers' lives. Are we existing for nothing, for a void that will only grow upon our death? Do we naturally become preoccupied with the fact that we exist for nothing? A more contemporary examination of these issues can be observed through the radical theology of Altizer, which acknowledges and builds upon the words of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

Altizer is recognized for his theistic acknowledgement and consideration of the death of God through what is referred to as radical theology. Radical theology is a contemporary development that attempts to acknowledge atheism through varying Christian perspectives (Altizer ix). Altizer's "Theology and the Death of God" (1966) considers the crisis of contemporary theology. He states that it is "unquestionably in a

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[10] Martin Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977) 61-62.

state of crisis, perhaps the most profound crisis which Christian theology has faced since its creation."[11] Altizer expresses this crisis as manifest in three ways. The first of which is reminiscent of Kierkegaard. It exists in the relation of biblical theology to dogmatic theology. The second area of crisis is manifest through the death of God, and in contemporary man's existential reaction to this death. The third area, Altizer describes as existing as a collapse of Christendom and the resulting relation of community faith to the institutions that uphold society.[12] He states that modern theology, essentially, was founded by Kierkegaard, "not simply in response to the collapse of Christendom, but more deeply in response to the advent of a reality that was wholly divorced from the world of faith, or, as Kierkegaard saw, a reality that was created by the negation of faith."[13] Kierkegaard considers the essence of human existence to be fully achieved only through faith. Nietzsche's proclamation, "God is dead," however, takes the essence of God and gives it to man, who can now exist not for God, but for the now. Nietzsche envisions the Eternal Recurrence, which exists through contemporary man's affirmation of the now. Eternal Recurrence, according to Altizer, is "a symbolic portrait of the truly contemporary man, the man who dares to live in *our* time, in *our* history, in *our* existence."[14] This man is the one with which we must deal in our analysis of the

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[11] Thomas Altizer, "Theology and the Death of God," Radical Theology and the Death of God, ed. Thomas J. J. Altizer and William Hamilton (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1966b) 95.

[12] Altizer, Death of God 95.

[13] Altizer, Death of God 95-96.

[14] Altizer, Death of God 99.

individual who exists now.

Altizer's "The Word and History" (1966) affirms God's death through a Christianity that is still living. It is only through an understanding of the Bible as distinct from Western morals and intellect that theology and faith can continue to exist: "To become itself, theology must negate itself."[15] Theology, in order to survive this crisis, must confess that God has died. The world has lost the meaning that was traditionally held within God. Now meaning is lost, and the individual exists for himself in the present. Altizer states, "Christian theology *is* a thinking response to the Word that is present upon the horizon of faith, and thus it is neither a systematization of a mythical vision nor a metaphysical or mystical system. The Christian Word appears in neither a primordial nor an eternal form; it is an incarnate Word, a Word that is real only to the extent that it becomes one with human flesh."[16] The Christian Word must be concrete, human, and historical, and it must be judged in relation to the present. It is through an acknowledgement of the death of God and of classical Christianity that its history can be made accessible to the individual. The individual can apply this history to his now and can experience the Christian Word, which expresses itself through a forward-moving self-negating process: "While an eschatological movement of the Word must necessarily negate the past moments of its own expression, it does so not to negate the reality of history itself, but rather to annul a past which forecloses the possibility of a realization of

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[15] Thomas Altizer, "Word and History," Radical Theology and the Death of God, ed. Thomas J. J. Altizer and William Hamilton (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1966a) 122.

[16] Altizer, Word and History 122.

its own future."[17] In order for an historical event to exist, it must hold meaning in the present. When its meaningful connection no longer exists, the event becomes non-historical. It is for this reason that the contemporary world must acknowledge the fact of God's death. He must admit that the Christian tradition has lost meaning in order for the Christian tradition to continue as a religion. God is now present only in his absence, and the Christian must therefore negate him. He must move forward, away from the void of God's absence: "A recognition that the Christian God is a creation of Christian history – of the coming together of Word and history in a particular time and space – can lead to an openness of faith beyond the history of Christendom."[18]

We have considered Kierkegaard's problem with Christendom, Nietzsche's prophesy of the madman, and Altizer's use of these issues in radical theology. God is dead, Christianity, although altered, is still alive, and the individual must go forward, living always for the now. While Altizer's suggestions for the continuation of Christianity are important to our discussion, we will not be applying them directly to our textual analysis. Our focus is grounded on the loss of the authority of God as a determining power and where this has that left the individual. The individual is left alone in a meaningless world. Similarly, the character in the novel finds that he exists in a world with no meaning and no authority. Through an understanding of the character's loss of textual authority, perhaps we can further understand our own loss of authority.

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[17] Altizer, Word and History 133.

[18] Altizer, Word and History 137.

I.2

The Author is Dead

Literary deconstruction clearly testifies that meaning is not. The text is not written around one meaning, intended by the author. In fact, the author is nothing but a momentary appendage to the chain of signification. The chain can lead to an appropriation of potential meaning by the reader at the time of reading. This appropriation, however, is temporary, fleeting, and entirely subjective. It does not hold any determinate meaning. This section provides an introduction to literary deconstruction through Derrida (1986) and Barthes (2001a; 2001b). Our examination of key ideas within the theory introduces a deconstructive analysis not only of the death of the author but also of the death of authority. Derrida's "Differance" (1986) introduces the main proponents of the theory, and emphasizes the non-referentiality of language and his resulting use of the term *differance*. He provides a comprehensive background to the theme of the death of the author. Barthes' "From Work to Text" (2001b) considers the plurality of the text and the unavoidable inability to find closure within the text. A text with no closure not only demands to be re-read, but it also provides less closure and more possibility with each reading. Barthes' "The Death of the Author" (2001a) denies the author's existence and his affiliation with the text. Can the author be so completely dissociated from the text as to be annihilated by the text's existence?

Deconstruction is both a continuation of and a reaction to structuralism.

Structuralism maintains that language is made up of a system of signs, consisting of signifiers and signifieds (sign = signifier + signified). The signified is produced through the differences that exist between itself and other signifieds. It is through difference that a thing exists. It exists only in relation to what is its opposite. For structuralists, this system creates a structure through which the author's intended meaning can be interpreted. A close examination of the interrelation of the form and the content of the text displays the structure used by the author in his presentation. Structuralism focuses on the differences and relations that make meaning possible and on the structure from which meaning is interpreted. It examines the differences within the text, the structures of these differences, and the structures created by these differences, which are all responsible for the maintenance of an interpretable meaning. Poststructuralism and deconstruction, while they do place an emphasis on structures, focus on the instability of these structures. Deconstructionists approach the text as a chain of signification that continually signifies more signifiers without ever presenting a signified. The signifiers in the text refer only to other signifiers, and not to meaning. Deconstruction regards language as refractory and uncontrollable. Language refers only to what is not, and it is consequently built solely upon what it negates without ever referring directly to what it *is*. Language is modified by time. It is altered by the world as it lives through it. It cannot remain unaffected by its experiences. Deconstruction and structuralism consider similar elements within the text, but while structuralism finds meaning through structures, deconstruction observes the self-dismantling of these structures through the non-referentiality of language.

Derrida states that language is fundamentally unreliable. Words have no referents.

They refer to what they are not and thereby establish themselves through their opposites. Red is red because it is not blue or yellow. All words are separate from the "real world" in that they do not exist as intrinsic truths or realities. Red is not red just because it is red. It is red because of what it is not, such as blue or yellow, for example. Meaning is thus subject to a process of continued deferral and is only understood in terms of its differences. Derrida's discussion in "Differance" considers this *differance* through the absence of the signified. For Derrida, language does not conform to the structuralist notion of sign = signifier + signified. The word becomes less meaningful through its association with predetermined states. It becomes a presence in the present only through its absence: "The sign represents the present in its absence."[19] The sign presents the absent present, deferring its presence. The signified is always absent, and the signifiers refer solely and continuously to other signifiers: "The first consequence to be drawn from this is that the signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself. Essentially and lawfully, every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences."[20] The "play of differences" Derrida calls *differance*, which means both to differ and to defer. *Differance* is the "possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general."[21] The chain of signification is a chain of

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[19] Jacques Derrida, "Differance," trans. Alan Bass, Critical Theory Since 1965, ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee: Florida State UP, 1986) 124.

[20] Derrida 125.

[21] Derrida 125.

signifiers that never reaches a signified. It does not provide any meaning, but it does allow for meaning to be momentarily appropriated by the reader. Derrida states that differance is the playing movement of differences that produce differences. In the system of language, only differences exist. In deconstruction, the signified remains eternally unfound through its countless signifiers. Derrida attributes the continuous motion of the chain of signification to *differance*:

> It is because of *differance* that the movement of signification is possible only if each so-called 'present' element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element, this trace being related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and constituting what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not: what it absolutely is not, not even a past or a future as a modified present. An interval must separate the present from what it is not in order for the present to be itself, but the interval that constitutes it as present must, by the same token, divide the present in and of itself.[22]

Derrida states that *differance* forces the movement of signifiers through the relation of distinct elements to the past and the future. It is through their differences that each can be defined, and it is through these definitions that one may find meaning, but meaning, for Derrida, does not exist. It is indefinable and ungraspable. Derrida denies meaning, and he

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[22] Derrida 126-127.

denies the closure from which it would be drawn. The absence of closure is due to the forever unfound signified.

Barthes' "From Work to Text" provides a clear discussion of the poststructuralist concept of the text, its sign system, and the play of signifiers. He discusses the text itself as a sign, and considers its continuous deferment of the signified, and, thus, its inability to provide concrete meaning. The text does not have a centre and does not lead to closure. Signifiers, which are dynamic and unstable, are also ultimately non-referential. Both the text and the language from which it is made exist as fluid and changeable and do not maintain a concrete or absolute meaning. The text can thus be understood as plural. The plurality of the text is due to the indeterminacy of meaning. In Barthes' discussion of the text as plural, he states:

> The Text is not a co-existence of meanings, but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination. The plural of the Text depends, that is, not on the ambiguity of its contents but on what might be called the *stereographic plurality* of its weave of signifiers (etymologically, the text is a tissue, a woven fabric).[23]

Barthes' discussion of the plurality of meaning corresponds with Derrida's concept of the chain of signifiers. Each signifier reacts to any contact with all other signifiers. Barthes' signifiers are intricately woven together; they are interrelated, yet distinct. He describes

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[23] Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," trans. Stephen Heath, The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001b) 1472.

the perception of the reader as consisting of a "disconnected, heterogeneous variety of substances and perspectives,"[24] which are identifiable but unique in their contexts. Readers must recognize that every combination of codes is unique through its differences to previous and often related codes. The author, when he revisits his text, must do so also as a guest, for his life has not controlled, but merely influenced, the signifiers, and his meeting will be with altered signifiers in the chain of signification. Both he and the text have been subject to a range of experiences. They have separated.

Barthes' "The Death of the Author" is not about the absence of an authorial voice. It is about the complete denial of authorial voice. The text celebrates the birth of the reader. The reader should be concerned with neither the origin nor the intention of the text. His concern is only for his reading, at the moment, of the text. Barthes considers writing not as the authorial expression of concrete concepts and themes, but, rather, as the "destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body of writing."[25] He claims that it is language that speaks, and not the author. Through writing, the author actually disappears – he is but a vehicle for language to speak itself. The death of the author transforms the modern text, which is written as a consistent enunciation of the present: "every text is eternally written *here* and

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[24] Barthes, Work 1472.

[25] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," trans. Stephen Heath, The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001a) 1466.

now."[26] Writing therefore no longer refers to "an operation of recording, notation, representation, 'depiction', "[27] but to an enunciation of the present. The text does not attempt to define any absolute truths, such as a theological meaning or an authorial message. To give the text an author is to give the text a final signified: closure and a meaning. Barthes sees the act of reading as an unweaving of a fabric, not as an attempt to explain the characteristics of the fabric and the weave. It must be understood that there is nothing beyond the fabric. Its weave is all that it is:

> writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. In precisely this way literature (it would be better from now on to say *writing*), refusing to assign a 'secret', an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases – reason, science, law.[28]

Barthes' deconstruction, like that of Derrida, claims that language signifies and signifies without ever reaching a signified. This process exists in both the literary world and the world from which the literature comes, where meaning of the self and of the world at large is questioned. In both cases, meaning is not stable or concrete but elusive. To deny intended or concrete meaning in literature is to deny the author. Similarly, to

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[26] Barthes, Death 1468.

[27] Barthes, Death 1468.

[28] Barthes, Death 1469.

recognize the absence of authorial intent and absolute meaning in the world is to deny God. God exists as the absent authorial presence in the modern world, and the author now exists as the absent authorial presence in the text. The "author" presents characters who search for meaning while they simultaneously acknowledge the absence of meaning, thus (re)presenting the contemporary individual who faces the growing certainty not only of God's absence, but, also, of humanity's murder of God.

Burke's The Death and Return of the Author provides an alternate perspective to the death of the author. He claims that the author, who may have possibly disappeared, is very much alive and in control of his text. In order to provide an adequate examination of the death of authority and its effects on individual identity, one must take into consideration the possibility that the author is still very much alive and very much in control of his text. While deconstruction reacts to structuralism, Burke reacts to deconstruction. He asserts that a close reading of anti-authorial discourse and its conceptual structures must be undertaken. It is through an analysis of Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida that he maintains that the author's presence must be reinstated in order for theoretical inquiry to continue. To bury the author does not leave the text with a future. The death of the author, as Altizer presents with the death of God, should promote further investigation and theorization on the subject. An acknowledgement of the "crisis" does not necessarily end with the crisis, but should be followed with a newness resulting from the crisis and leading to the future, which does not cease to exist just because our traditional authority does. With this in mind, one can consider that perhaps while the author is less present, or less authoritative within the realm of his text, he still exists and

can still maintain an association without demanding total conformity to his initial intention in the writing of his text. For our present purposes, however, we will consider the author to exist in a similar state to that of God: while he has existed, his presence has become an absence, and he cannot be held responsible for the meanings that we continue to extract from a text that no longer belongs to him. In keeping with Wimsatt and Beardsley's "The Intentional Fallacy," the text becomes the property of the public upon its release by the author.

I.3

The Disappearance of Self

> "The consideration of the impropriety, expropriation, and dispossession of the subject reveals the inadequacy of the incomplete form of nihilism that characterizes humanistic atheism. Nihilism cannot be complete unless the death of God is embodied in the death of the self."[29]

The Christian God no longer dominates the Western world. Similarly, no longer is the novel dominated by our traditional idea of the author. The death of authority is a significant event that reverberates through Christendom and the literary text. The individual is unavoidably affected, in both the religious world and the world of fiction. Identity, the self, is similarly broken down by deconstruction to exist as something that *is*, but also *is* not, in a world that, through deconstruction, becomes something that *is*, but also *is* not. Can the self survive in a world that has no meaning and no authority? Taylor's texts, Deconstructing Theology (1982) and Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology (1984), consider the effects of the loss of authority on individual identity. The death of the (A)author is examined through what he calls a "postmodern a/theology." Taylor's consideration of the disappearance of the self as a consequence of the death of authority is a key aspect to this study. We have established an historical background to the themes of

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[29] Mark C. Taylor, Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) 140.

the death of God and the death of the author, and now we will consider the effects of both deaths on the self.

Taylor's Deconstructing Theology is a continuation of the issues already discussed in Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Altizer. Taylor looks at deconstruction's inherent religious theme and recognizes the issues that continue to gain relevance in contemporary society. Religious doctrine is appropriately established as a pacifying agent for the world's most threatening concerns. Taylor shows this is his pretext:

> Deconstruction directs our attention to critical problems which merit serious consideration: the death of God, the disappearance of the self, the erasure of the (A)author, the interplay of absence and presence and of silence and speech, the encounter with death, the experience of exile, the insatiability of desire, the inevitability of delay, the burden of totality, the repression of difference, the otherness of Other, the subversion of authority, the end of the book, the opening of textuality, and the advent of writing. By creatively probing problems which haunt the postmodern imagination, Deconstruction identifies questions which contemporary theology can no longer avoid.[30]

The idea of the disappearance of the self is as characteristic of postmodernism as the theme of the death of God is of modernism. Established prior to and continuing through the modern period is the thematic possibility, through common acknowledgements, of the

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[30] Mark C. Taylor, pretext, Deconstructing Theology (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company,1982) xix.

absence (and even the death) of God. The modern to postmodern period brings forth another death – that of the author. An absence of authority in both religious and fictional realities unavoidably affects the self, the remaining existence in a world that has lost its traditional authority (or, at the very least, the traditional concept of authority). What becomes of the self? How does the individual react and persist in a world that, without determinate authority, offers little determinate meaning. As Taylor writes, "The death of God was the disappearance of the Author who had inscribed absolute truth and univocal meaning in world history and human experience."[31] The self who realizes this absence of authority, and thus of meaning, can either search for meaning that is noticeably absent or give up entirely. Existentialism is characterized by a consideration of meaning in a meaningless world. The acknowledgement of the self's existence as one that is essentially solitary and meaningless is the existential outcome of the absence of authority. Both Altizer and Taylor recognize that the death of God gives birth to the Word as a function, which does not replace but allows for some living traditional elements of theology to continue after God's death. Taylor continues that since God's death brings forth the Word, the death of self implies the birth of the text.[32] Barthes writes that the text contains a plurality of meaning. By this, he means that the text functions as an entity to which meaning can be attributed in relation to meanings that have already been established and that serve to uphold the fabric of the text. This is possible, however, only because there is no longer one implicit meaning within the text. With the death of authority, the text can

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[31] Taylor, Deconstructing Theology 96.

[32] Taylor, Deconstructing Theology 96.

function on a number of levels. It no longer is regarded as necessarily portraying the author. Rather, it presents a possible means of interpreting the self and the world as well as the text. This is important because the self needs reaffirmation both in the real and the fictional worlds. The self, as dead as God on account of God's death, must deny his own existence. What then becomes of the self whose selfhood has died?

Taylor's Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology considers the effects of the death of God through what he calls a postmodern a/theology. This text provides a more in-depth examination of four issues: the death of God, the disappearance of the self, history, and the closure of the book. Taylor also presents the death of the (A)author through a postmodern a/theology. The Western self considers his existence in relation to his concept of God, and when God's presence becomes an absence, the self is left alone in a world whose authority has died and whose meaning has consequently been removed. The self, as language and through language, can only define itself in terms of how and what it is not. God is dead. God defines people. God is dead. Who and how am I? God is dead. What do I do? As Taylor writes, "In the effort to secure its identity and establish its presence, the self discovers its unavoidable difference and irrepressible absence [...] The search for self-presence in self-consciousness leads to the discovery of the absence of the self."[33] The image of man is made in the image of God. In order for the individual to present himself, he must re-present that with which he is familiar. He re-presents images of God to himself as presentations of himself. But where does that leave him?

The evidence of conflict between classical Christendom and contemporary

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[33] Taylor, Erring 50.

Christendom is clearly presented by a number of figures from the 19th Century to the present day, from a questioning of the modes of religiosity to a possibility for further development of the religiosity with which we are now familiar. Whereas Altizer suggests that these developments are applicable to radical theology through an historical consideration of Christendom, Taylor provides a means for these developments to exist as a radical Christology. In so doing, he allows for a reinterpretation of traditional Christianity through deconstruction. His analysis goes beyond that of Altizer in his suggestion of the interpretation of classical theology through deconstruction's interplay of presence and absence and of identity and difference. In his terms, theology is read through a deconstructive theory of interpretation. As such, religious concepts, which, due to the death of God, are no longer prominent aspects within the religion, can be reinterpreted in a manner in which they gain a renewed relevance to the belief. Rather than dismiss a God who is dead, we must acknowledge that God was alive but is now dead. Taylor considers even further the possible a/theological madness of postmodernity, but for our present purposes, we will simply consider the individual of the now, and refrain from delving too far into the theological progression which arises from the death of God. God's death is for us of most importance as the primary cause for the loss of identity in contemporary society, and, thus, in contemporary literature. The self has become an existential being, and through the following textual analysis, the characters examined will prove to exist as solitary beings, seeking not only meaning, but also their selves through their own multiple identities in a world that fails to contain or provide any closure.

I.4

Deconstruction and Translation

In order to provide an impartial analysis of five texts, only two of which are studied in the source language, we must consider the issue of translation. There are many translation theories, but for our present purposes, we will maintain a deconstructive mode of analysis and consider translation in terms of deconstruction. While most traditional translation theories involve the search for concrete meaning in one system of signification, which can then be transferred to another system of signification, deconstruction resists the categorical separation of source text from target text and of language from meaning.

Derrida's "Des Tours de Babel" (1985) raises issues of translation and untranslatability. What is interesting in his text is the applicability of the issues to any reading, regardless of whether the text has been translated. Derrida presents translation, as well as readings that take place in the original language, as a process of modification, deferral, and displacement of the original text. Derrida's focus in translation is on the relation of languages rather than on copying and reproducing. What is evident in translation is not language referring to meaning, but of language referring to language. The potential for any text to be translated exists on the same level as the potential for any meaning to be appropriated through any reading of any text. The author does not control his text, language does.

In our analysis of translated texts, we will treat the texts as we do those that are not translated. While translation cannot be dismissed, our focus is on the present

relevance of text, and this present exists through the English translation. It is through this present focus that each novel is considered. This survey, then, is a comparative study of five novels, each distinctly culturally specific, yet each read through the English language. Each text deals with, in part, the theme of the death of authority and its effects on the individual's identity. The individual's identity, on account of this loss of authority, is fragmented, multiple, or incomplete, and the individual seeks identity (either his own or that of another) in a world that he recognizes as meaningless.

This said, we will treat the translated texts as we do those that are not translated. What must be acknowledged is that three of the five novels have been translated and, as such, may not as accurately represent the cultures from which they originate as they would in their source language. The following analysis of these novels, for our purposes, is not affected by the fact that they are translated. It is influenced by the theme of the death of God, the theme of the death of the author, and the idea of the loss of self. Thus, there is an element of deconstruction within the textual analysis. The analysis itself, however, is by no means undertaken through a deconstructive or a poststructuralist mode of examination.

Part II

II.5

The Man Alone in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*

Garcia Marquez's Chronicle of a Death Foretold (1982) is the story of a small Latin American town and the code of honour that forces two brothers to kill another man. The story begins with the morning of Santiago Nasar's death. This particular morning is characterized by two events: it is the morning following the marriage of Bayardo San Roman and Angela Vicario, and it is the morning of the bishop's arrival to bless the town. These two events provide the necessary distractions for the murder of Santiago Nasar. The narrator recounts the events of the morning of the murder through the observations and recollections of the townspeople, who, having been forewarned of his murder, do nothing to prevent it.

It is through a set of unfortunate circumstances that Santiago Nasar is murdered. And it is through the recollections of those involved with the morning's activities that the chronicle is built. The characters create, through their personal observations and memories, a chronology of the events leading up to Santiago Nasar's death. Each character is described and provides an opinion but is not developed. It is through the character descriptions that the standards to which the individual is expected to conform, both the religious and the civil laws of the society, are expressed. The characters themselves, however, fail to conform to these standards in either thought or action.

The following analysis of Garcia Marquez's Chronicle of a Death Foretold

provides a deconstruction of the text's cultural specificity with the intent of showing that a loss of authority has resulted in a loss of identity, which is evident in contemporary world literature. Garcia Marquez's text is specifically Latin American, yet the actions of the characters are more specific to the post-modern individual, alive in the world and with no authority. The absence of authority in the text is expressed through the bishop's visit, the Colonel's disbelief, and Father Amador's distraction. The loss of individual identity is portrayed through the fragmented characters of the story, including the narrator and Santiago Nasar himself. The lack of closure that permeates the text is further exemplified by the absence of any definitive answers to the questions that arise from the murder of Santiago Nasar.

The story begins in the early morning with those who eagerly await the bishop's arrival. Visible are the donations of wood and cocks for the bishop, and heard is the band, playing for his arrival. Santiago Nasar is only one among many who rush from their homes with the hope of kissing the bishop's ring. His mother, Placida Linero, accurately predicts that the bishop will not even get off the boat. In fact, the boat does not even stop. The bishop makes the sign of the cross as a blessing for those who have come to respect him, and, almost simultaneously, "the boat whistle let off a shower of compressed steam as it passed by the docks, and it soaked those who were closest to the edge."[34] The religious authority is very appropriately presented and questioned at the very beginning of the text. It is clear that it has become distant and inaccessible to this community. The

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[34] Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Chronicle of a Death Foretold, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: Ballantine Books, 1982) 19.

bishop performs his duty, blessing those who have risen to greet him, but he cannot fulfill their expectations. There is no subjective interaction, and the bishop consequently forfeits his authoritative power. He is absent, and he is unable to provide the people with his subjective self. The direct religious authority, Father Amador, is also absent. He is aware of the Vicario brothers' plan, but he too is distracted by the excitement of the bishop's arrival. Upon hearing of the plan to murder Santiago, his first reaction, "it wasn't any business of mine but something for the civil authorities,"[35] is brief. He quickly realizes that he should warn Placida Linero, yet in his haste to greet the bishop, he forgets: "You have to understand,' he told me, 'that the bishop was coming on that unfortunate day."[36] The bishop, who blesses the town from the boat, provides the necessary distraction for the murder to go unstopped. Both he and the priest are religious figures of authority, but both are absent figures of authority. Perhaps the growing separation between the individual and traditional religious authority is a reflection of the current state of the church, rather than of the individual. Are figures of religious authority less approachable in contemporary society than in the past? Does the individual behave accordingly, with the hypocritical nature of holding a religious belief while simultaneously acting in a manner that is in contradiction to this belief?

The civil authority in Chronicle of a Death Foretold is also absent in the time leading up to the murder of Santiago Nasar. At approximately four in the morning, Colonel Aponte is made aware of the Vicario brothers' plan. He speaks with the brothers

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[35] Garcia Marquez 80-81.

[36] Garcia Marquez 81.

and disarms them. He sends them home, and he feels "at peace with his soul."[37] Some time later, he hears that they have just been seen carrying knives, and he realizes: "they must have come back with two new ones."[38] He recognizes the gravity of the situation, and he promises to take care of it at once. Unfortunately, he decides to first check on a date for that night's dominoes, and, while he is in the social club, the crime is committed. Colonel Aponte is an absent authority. He does not warn Santiago Nasar, nor does he stop the Vicario brothers. As the civil authority, he represents and defends the law, but here he does not. On account of yet another absence, that of Dr. Dionisio Iguaran, Santiago Nasar's already knife-butchered body goes through further mutilation. Father Carmen Amador is called to perform the autopsy in the doctor's absence. While the town clearly does have figures of authority, both religious and civil, these figures are absent in most ways. They fulfill their respective obligations only minimally. Similarly, the townspeople are portrayed as behaving in manners that are inconsistent with the expectations of their descriptions.

The characters who act the least in the story are those who, through their titles, are most expected to perform. The townspeople seek protection, physically through the civil authorities, and spiritually through the religious authorities. These figures of authority, however, fail to provide any protection. Both Father Amador and Colonel Aponte are distracted on this particular morning. The behaviour of the priest is similar to that of the bishop. For both, their presence becomes an absence through their inaction. Sadly, both

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[37] Garcia Marquez 65.

[38] Garcia Marquez 130.

figures of religious authority are absent when their services are required. While the Colonel disarms the Vicario brothers, he neglects to consider that they may not have been stopped. The figures of authority are established in order to protect the people, yet the personal preoccupations of these individuals prevent them from maintaining the structures to which they belong. Consequently, it is through the individual behaviours of the characters that the structures of the society become destabilized. This de-stabilization suggests that while the text does belong to a cultural place, it is unable to escape from the fate of the postmodern individual – the recognition of the absence of all possible meaning.

The narrator, a close friend of Santiago Nasar, expresses familiarity with the characters to which we, as readers, are introduced. He provides very descriptive introductions to some very interesting characters. None of the characters, however, are complete. Each, for his own particular reason, is only partially presented, and only through his recollections of that fateful morning, and through the observations of others. Our present analysis will focus on Santiago Nasar and the Vicario family. These characters are introduced as structural elements in the society, yet they do not behave in accordance with the structures that they represent. Thus, the civil and religious authorities fail to act as figures of authority, and the established gender distinctions crumble under the true natures of the characters.

Santiago Nasar's parents, Ibrahim Nasar and Placida Linero, provide an appropriate introduction to this observation. Their names suggest action and peacefulness, respectively. And they are each said to have provided their son with specific skills.

Santiago Nasar reportedly learned the manipulation of firearms, the mastery of bird training, gained a love for horses, and learned valour and prudence from his father, while he gained a sixth sense from his mother.[39] This sixth sense, however, fails him on this particular morning, where any intuitive notions about his forthcoming and foretold death may have proved helpful to him. Neither he nor his mother exercise the power of this sixth sense when his life is threatened and taken. Santiago Nasar is also said to have inherited from his father the unfortunate tendency to treat women disrespectfully, as expressed by Victoria Guzman, the cook, and her daughter, Divina Flor, who is the recipient of much of this unfortunate behaviour. The reversal of the established male tendencies and female tendencies is initiated by Victoria Guzman, who defends her daughter and threatens Santiago Nasar with a bloody knife, " 'Let go of her, white man,' she ordered him seriously. 'You won't have a drink of that water as long as I'm alive.' "[40] The characters are described in accordance with the social standards, but Victoria Guzman is the first to behave in a fashion that is in contradiction with these standards. She also disturbs Santiago Nasar with her ability to tear the steaming innards from barely dead rabbits and feed them to the dogs: " 'Don't be a savage,' he told her. 'Make believe it was a human being'. "[41] which foreshadows Santiago Nasar's final experience in his kitchen. Victoria Guzman, as a woman of strength, deviates from the image of Placida Linero, and gives birth to the possibility for an upheaval in the gender distinctions that

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[39] Garcia Marquez 6.

[40] Garcia Marquez 8.

[41] Garcia Marquez 9.

prevail throughout the first part of the text.

Angela Vicario and her family are also important in the analysis of the gender structures that are established and dismantled in the text. The Vicario family is described through very gendered terms: "The boys were brought up to be men. The girls had been reared to get married."[42] The daughters are properly feminine: "They knew how to do screen embroidery, sew by machine, weave bone lace, wash and iron, make artificial flowers and fancy candy, and write engagement announcements."[43] Angela Vicario is the youngest and prettiest. While the family observes a two-year mourning period for death of the second-youngest daughter, the mourning is "relaxed inside the house but rigorous on the street."[44] The discord in external and internal modes of mourning in behalf of the Vicario family only prophesies the de-structuring of gender roles in the latter half of the story. For the Vicario family, the order of society is upheld through public display. Angela, like her sisters, will be easily married because "they've been raised to suffer."[45] This story, however, is clearly an exploration of the suffering cause by Angela Vicario. Her husband suffers when he learns that his wife is not a virgin. Her own family suffers to hear the same news, and they suffer with the loss of such a prestigious and wealthy member of the family. Her brothers suffer under the weight of their duty, as does Santiago Nasar. His mother, his friends, and his fiancee all suffer as he dies. Angela Vicario suffers

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[42] Garcia Marquez 34.

[43] Garcia Marquez 34.

[44] Garcia Marquez 34.

[45] Garcia Marquez 34.

as well.

Angela Vicario's mother, Purisima del Carmen, is described as having "married forever."[46] She has immersed herself into the lives of others to the extent that "at times one forgot she still existed."[47] She hides her character through her devotion to her husband and her children, and she is even described as looking like a nun. Purisima del Carmen's name signifies the purity that her youngest daughter has lost. When Angela Vicario is returned to her family by her husband on the night of their wedding, her mother beats her senselessly, and because her father is blind, it is her who brothers must restore her honour by killing Santiago Nasar. The father seemingly plays no role in the events that follow her return. He is not acknowledged. It is while she beats her daughter that Purisima del Carmen asserts her own existence. It is through the pain that she inflicts on Angela Vicario that she can find herself. And while she herself is said to have lost her identity through her marriage, she sends her daughter away, hiding her identity, because she cannot be married.

Pedro and Padro Vicario must kill Santiago Nasar – it is their duty as the males in the Vicario family. They go about their task in the hopes of being stopped. It is clear from the openness with which they announce their plans. Clotilde Armenta senses their situation, and tells the narrator that she "was certain that the Vicario brothers were not as eager to carry out the sentence as to find someone who would do them the favor of

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[46] Garcia Marquez 33.

[47] Garcia Marquez 33.

stopping them."[48] They announce to everyone they see that they are looking for Santiago Nasar to kill him. Pedro and Padro Vicario understand that as the men of the family they are in charge of restoring their sister's honour. The means to this restoration, however, are quite unfavourable for them. It is the inaction of the people that allows for the brothers to kill Santiago Nasar. The warnings begin at four in the morning, yet the brothers are still able to perform their duty. It is not only due to the lack of action on the part of the authorities, but it is also the inaction of the characters that allows for Santiago Nasar to go without warning, until it is too late.

The townspeople, who are able to rise early in the hopes of seeing, and perhaps even meeting the bishop, are unable to provide proper warning to Santiago Nasar. According to our narrator, every woman character with a tendency for the foretelling of events fails to foretell Santiago Nasar's death. The "foretelling" in this story is the concrete knowing of the impending murder. The entire town is aware that the Vicario brothers plan to kill him, yet not one character is able to warn Santiago Nasar, or to stop the Vicario brothers. Thus, while they are introduced as a community that believes in and acts for God, they fail to protect a citizen from a brutal death. All of the characters that are described in detail deconstruct the very structures that are established through their descriptions. Their supposed characteristics exist as stable elements of the society, yet their actions and thoughts establish them as individuals – as distinct elements existing within a society. This individual expression of identity disconnects the person from the society, and is a result of the loss of authority. The disconnection of the individual from

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[48] Garcia Marquez 65.

society leaves him with an identity that conforms in part to the society to which he belongs and in part to his own subjective ideas. His identity is fragmented. He belongs to two realms, and he is unable to reconcile his self into a complete self.

The absence of closure in the text is most apparent through the inability to know Santiago Nasar and whether he really did take Angela Vicario's virginity. The story is about the one character who is not present. The narrator is unable to present him subjectivity, and many of the townspeople can only postulate as to his thoughts on the morning of his death. In order for the story to be complete, his position must be asserted. Is he guilty? Is there any other reason why Angela Vicario would assert that Santiago Nasar took her virginity? He is described as showing complete surprise at the announcement that the Vicario brothers are going to kill him: "his manner reflected not so much fear as confusion."[49] And it is through a set of unfortunate circumstances that Santiago Nasar has no time to reflect on Nahir Miguel's warning that the Vicario brothers are looking for him to kill him. We, as readers, are left to assume that Santiago Nasar is innocent. We watch him stumble to his death, while we consider its reason.

Angela Vicario is suspected to have given Santiago Nasar's name for several reasons, none of which agree that Santiago Nasar is the culprit. Pedro Vicario demands to know "who it was" and she "only took the time necessary to say the name. She looked for it in shadows, she found it at first sight among the many, many easily confused names from this world and the other, and she nailed it to the wall with her well-aimed dart, like a

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[49] Garcia Marquez 135.

butterfly with no will whose sentence has always been written."[50] It is suggested that she pulls his name out of a hat, but when she is asked about it years later, she replies: "'Don't beat it to death, cousin,' she told me. 'He was the one.' "[51] Yet her insistence continues to be held in disbelief. The chronicle presents the inability for the truth to be known when it is reconstructed through varying perspectives. While the story has been told, the cause has only been suggested, and in such a manner that further possibilities arise. Angela's character, a simple girl who has been raised for marriage, causes the events to take place. Whether or not Santiago's character really did play any part in these events remains a mystery. Her insistence goes untrusted in the text, and it allows for further inquiry into the time preceding the story. Her actions are the most notable in the text because they are the least defined. They also serve to invite further investigation into her life, they raise a larger question mark over the original question mark of the text. At the end of the novella, we, as readers, are left with numerous questions but no answers.

Chronicle of a Death Foretold is the story of the murder of one man by two avenging brothers. This vengeance rests on the words of Angela Vicario. Her words are presented as most probably untrue and are considered as most probably untrue throughout the text. More importantly, her words begin the destabilization of the structures in the text. The females, described as emotionally charged, prove themselves to be the more active of the two genders. The males, who are described actively, fail to act. Pedro and Padro Vicario do act, but do so without eagerness or pride. They perform their duty, but

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[50] Garcia Marquez 53.

[51] Garcia Marquez 104.

they do so out of necessity alone. The structures, which are established and described within the text, are also de-structured through the events of the text. This is caused by an absence of authority, which affects the individual in such a manner that his identity becomes fragmented. Through these characters, the narrator reconstructs the morning of the murder. We are acquainted with only fragments of complete characters and with only a fragment of the complete story: "the use of the deliberately humble term 'chronicle' rather than 'history' implies, seeks to eschew such narrative duplicities only to demonstrate the more forcefully the intractable uncertainties of the events themselves."[52] The lack of closure to the text is due to the inability to know more than we do. It is the postmodern loss of authority that has shattered the postmodern individual.

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[52] Michael Bell, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1993) 86-87.

II.6

Begin Game Over: who is who in Pinball

Jerzy Kosinski's Pinball (1982) examines the multiple identities of four typical North Americans and the possibility for a public figure to conceal his identity in a typical North American society. The quest to discover identity carries the story through the intersection of the lives of Patrick Domostroy and James Osten and the two women who connect them. Music plays an essential role in the story; it features as the common element shared by each character, serving to both connect and to separate them. The structures of the media-driven society become destabilized through the characters of Domostroy and Goddard, who purposely live existential lives by choosing anonymity where most dream of fame.

Patrick Domostroy is a washed up, semi-retired music composer living in the South Bronx. He is approached by Andrea Gwynplaine, and offered to be given both sex and money to help her find and meet Goddard: "Goddard has sold more records than any other pop star. In six years he has produced six LP's, each of which has stayed at the top of the charts for many months. Four of them became platinum, selling over a million albums each. In addition, he probably had at least a dozen single hits, including six gold ones that grossed over a million dollars each."[53] Goddard, however, is a mystery. No one knows who he is, what he looks like, or where he lives, yet they hear his music daily.

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[53] Jerzy Kosinski, Pinball, (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1982) 33.

James Osten, whose father owns Etude Classics, the company under which Domostroy's music is distributed, is Goddard, and not even his girlfriend Donna Downes knows his secret. Domostroy helps Andrea by manipulating Goddard into finding her, and he helps Donna, a pianist, with her technique in preparation for a competition in Warsaw.

Pinball presents a lack of authority in both the daily lives of the characters and in their internal selves. The most authoritative figure in the lives of each of these characters is music. Goddard's ability to maintain his musical status through his anonymity reflects the present state of the individual's relationship with God. The public hears Goddard's music, as they have heard God's message, but Goddard, like God, is absent. Neither figure provides a subjective self to the public. While music is unable to replace the concept of an authoritative figure, its position as an authoritative voice suggests that contemporary religiosity has reached a state where it can be replaced by any influential power. In North America, this power is typically media-driven, and short-lived. The individual becomes a part of its crowd, and, consequently, loses his individuality in his reverence for the trend. He exists in the crowd externally, but his individuality exists only internally. The structures that uphold American society are destabilized in Pinball through the individual's choice to live existentially. He decides that anonymity is more rewarding than the public's admiration. The postmodern individual is a part of the crowd – yet he is completely alone. While he recognizes what he is supposed to be, he cannot conform his internal desire with his external pressures. His identity is split. His authority is lost. He is given the choice to quit or to play again.

The lack of authority in the text is common to contemporary North American

culture. The replacement of absent religious and civil authorities with a media-driven voice that is not physically present, but is present in this present time and changes over time, is culturally accurate. The postmodern individual, unable to access God, searches for alternate sources of guidance and comfort. The concept of God does not appear in the text, but music does. Goddard represents an extension of the contemporary approach to God through his music. Domostroy is the traditional enthusiast. He appreciates the thoughtful composition of classical music. Goddard also appreciates classical music, and his musical influences are reflected in his music. His music, however, is popular through its accessibility – he addresses his audiences' present concerns. He represents the change in religiosity that is necessary to accommodate a changing society. The past should not be forgotten, but neither can it be re-lived. While the ideals of the past are not as relevant to the world today as they were, it the fact that they were relevant that must be acknowledged.

"Goddard becomes for his public, for Andrea, for Domostroy, and perhaps for Osten, an ideology, a purpose and goal outside the self, an external meaning, an answer."[54] His popular music reflects the influences of classical musicians and techniques and expresses the necessity for God to be re-appropriated in the present, rather then dismissed or taken literally. Like God's existence in the contemporary world, Goddard is absent and can only be approached objectively. He releases his music to the public, understanding that

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[54] Everman, Welch D., Jerzy Kosinski: The Literature of Violation (San Bernardino: The Borgo Press, 1991) 145.

> Once his music was published, it became public property, and people could then respond to it according to their own needs and means. He was no exception; he became at that point one more anonymous listener, and his critical judgement – whether he was listening in a car, a music shop, a disco, or at home; whether he was alone or among others – was no better, no worse, no more astute or more valuable, than the judgement of any other listener.[55]

God's absence is manifest through his presence. He has become so attainable that He has been lost. Contrariwise, Goddard's presence is manifest through his absence. He is not attainable, therefore he exists, as decided by the public: "Each of a number of psychics hired by tabloid newspapers and fan magazines had come up with a different composite of the man."[56] Goddard replaces God. While both are invisible, one is present. Goddard is thus more concrete, and consequently, he is more powerful. He rejects society however, and he welcomes solitude. His personal desire is to remain an individual in the crowd.

Domostroy is a former classical pianist and composer who works part-time at a club, Kreutzer's, playing piano. He compares his past to Goddard's present: "With a painful twinge, Domostroy recalled the time in his own career when he was pursued around the clock by interviewers, music company executives, TV and film producers, and fans. What if he, like Goddard, had decided then or earlier to escape all publicity and live

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[55] Kosinski 140.

[56] Kosinski 37.

his life in seclusion, or in disguise?"[57] He considers the differences between himself and James Osten, and he realizes that Osten's decision to remain anonymous is beneficial to his music. While Domostroy's art is his life, Osten's life is his own. Goddard, the public, nor themedia control Osten. He maintains complete freedom from the media, and the public sees him as a part of the crowd, as James Osten. Domostroy is envious of the path that Osten has given himself:

> by remaining hidden from his public, Jimmy Osten could at least make what he wanted of his life and keep his art in the jukebox. Domostroy, on the other hand, because of his former celebrity as a performer and composer, could never separate his life from his art; and since his composing had ended, his life had become his only art – aimless as the path of a steel ball in a pinball machine. To Goddard, the public success of his music undoubtedly would always be a source of pleasure and reassurance; for Domostroy, bereft his will to compose, the sources of pleasure and reassurance had narrowed to an occasional feat of sexual intimacy – as challenging now in its spontaneity as writing music once had been.[58]

Osten's freedom does not extend to his identity, however, and he is required to sacrifice many aspects of his personality in order to have freedom from his art. Domostroy considers the freedom that he no longer has from the media because of his celebrity as a

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[57] Kosinski 279.

[58] Kosinski 279.

music composer. He envies the ability for Osten to preserve his freedom while accessing the public through his art.

Osten creates Goddard in order to preserve his freedom. This freedom does not come easily. While Osten does have a private life, he must work hard to keep it private: "Osten loved his anonymity because it guaranteed his freedom, and he loved his freedom because it let him be anonymous."[59] His freedom, however, is deceptive. He must disguise himself in order to be free. He must alter his voice in order to be free. He must lie to his family and his friends in order to be free. Osten sacrifices most of his freedom in order to be free. He enjoys invisibility, but he must enjoy it in his own company. While one of his songs quotes Joyce:

I am the boy

That can enjoy

Invisibility[60]

it is still he who must maintain his invisibility in order to enjoy this invisibility. Goddard is a public image with no image. The public's conceptions of his image are created through speculation and imagination. The ability for his popularity to be sustained *through* his absence destabilizes the structures that uphold the culture that reveres him. As Boris Pregel warns Osten: "Success estranges", "and great success banishes. Be prepared for that."[61] Osten succeeds at preserving his anonymity, but he does becomes

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[59] Kosinski 139.

[60] Kosinski 36.

[61] Kosinki 150.

estranged and banished from honesty:

> Listening to Donna, Osten felt his innermost feelings, one after another, being torpedoed. Her words forced him to repress – even during their lovemaking – his dream, however faint, of one day sharing himself entirely with her. Through all of their most abandoned moments a single thought worked on Osten like an isolated musical phrase: if Donna ever learned the truth about Goddard, she would have to reject him utterly, and no amount of lovemaking, tender or violent, spontaneous or calculated, could return her to the fervor she felt for him now.
>
> In the meantime, what she felt for him now was actually invalid, owing to what she did not know – and could never guess – about his life.[62]

Osten sacrifices much of his private self in order to keep himself private. While he does benefit from his anonymity, he finds himself lost in the character of himself. He must create a very distinct Jimmy Osten in order to preserve the separation between Osten and Goddard. He is anonymous, and he is invisible, but who is he?

"When Patrick Domostroy turned the ignition key of his car, no sound came from the engine and no lights showed on the dashboard. He tried again and again, and still nothing happened: the battery was dead."[63] Pinball opens with an end. Domostroy must recharge his battery in order for his car to continue running. Readers are introduced to Domostroy, who introduces Andrea Gwynplaine. Through Andrea, Goddard, James

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[62] Kosinki 172.

[63] Kosinki 3.

Osten, and Donna Downes are introduced. The cast for this particular event is chosen, and their interactions tell the story. Through the text, Goddard and James Osten become one character, and Andrea is killed. Domostroy rejects the possibility for a continued relationship with Donna, which ends the tale of the four characters. Andrea is dead, James Osten is safety both himself and Goddard, and Donna Downes wins the competition at Warsaw. Back at Kreutzer's, where he began, another woman, Lucretia, a hooker with savings, approaches Domostroy and asks him to father her child. Like Andrea's offer of money and sexual pleasure for a path to Goddard, Lucretia offers travel and sexual pleasure for a path to motherhood, with no further commitment. Domostroy refuses this proposal, and steps to the pinball machine, the Mata Hari: "its ONE TO FOUR CAN PLAY and GAME OVER signs still flashing from the previous game."[64] Domostroy drops a coin into the slot, but when BEGIN GAME begins to flash, he is momentarily indecisive about playing again. Does he play? We only know that his encounters with Andrea, James Osten, and Donna Downes has ceased. This particular cycle has ended.

The characters in Pinball meet, interact, and separate. The lack of traditional authority, both religious and civil, in the contemporary world is reflected through the characters' multiple identities and destabilizing characteristics. The search for identity in both the self and the world leads to an acceptance of the existential situation. They lose their cultural significance and become distinctly postmodern individuals, living a cyclical and insignificant life: "a musical event was without a determined beginning or an

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[64] Kosinki 287.

inevitable end; it was neither a consequence of anything that preceded it nor a cause of anything to follow; it was eternity, attainable at any moment, not at the end of time."[65] The text, like the lives of these characters, is like a musical event: there is an absence of closure and of meaning. It begins with the death of a battery – that which provides constant energy, that which should re-energize itself through its life – and ends with the opportunity to begin again yet another cycle or to quit. In the end, when Domostroy has nothing to do and nowhere to go, he reminds himself that he "could always take the car out."[66]

Pinball presents a distinctly North American culture. The media replaces religion, and the individual is lost to its power. Pinball is about the search for identity. The multiple identities of the characters are consequences of an absence of authority. The characters are consequently subject to the media, under which the crowd is formed. The crowd, dominated by the media and its public figures, erases individuality. In the text, it is through the public figures that the need to preserve one's individuality is most clearly expressed. Domostroy explains that he prefers companions who do not recognize his name as a public image. He hopes that "Their judgement of him, like his of them, depended only on how he presented himself in any number of chance meetings, never on a knowledge of his past."[67] Like Osten, Domostroy prefers his privacy to the world of the media. Domostroy has retreated from the media, and Osten simply denies it access to his

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[65] Kosinki 279.

[66] Kosinki 287.

[67] Kosinki 10.

life. The integration of tradition and the present, both as authority and in personality, insists on the absence of closure. The game may end, but there is always an opportunity for another to begin.

II.7

Immortality and the Death of Self

"What is unbearable in life is not *being* but *being one's self*"[68]

Kundera's Immortality (1991) is the story of living and dying in a Paris fiction. It is a story of language and gestures, and of the identities that they form. Agnes is born through a motion at a swimming pool. Milan Kundera, the author and narrator, sees her wave youthfully to a lifeguard, and it is from this gesture that he creates her character. His authority is established as a creator, yet he himself must continually question this authority as the novel begins to inform him, and he becomes as much a reader as any other. The destabilization of authority leaves the individual in a postmodern state of self-questioning, that is, without answers or certainty. Agnes, immersed in a state of her own self-questioning, chooses to renounce her cultural tasks and immerse herself in her self, in her identity. She destabilizes the structures to which she belongs through her abandonment of her husband and her daughter. The story begins with her gesture, and through an investigation of contemporary authority and identity, also considers the love affair between Bettina and the immortal Goethe. The relevance of their story within this story is in its suggestion that the author's writing is not a timeless truth to the author. The text exists in its own right, as an appropriable entity, one which both the audience and the

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[68] Kundera, Milan, Immortality, trans. Peter Kussi (New York: Grove Press, 1991) 258.

author can approach newly over time.

Immortality questions authority, creates and searches for identity, and suggests that closure is no longer attainable. God has not only abandoned the world, but the world has abandoned His teachings. The collection of individuals exists as a crowd, and it is this crowd that distorts the remaining perceptions of both God and the church. The individual, a part of this collective, can find his individuality, his identity, only through a return to the self. Physical and mental detachments from the crowd are, for Agnes, the only means of regaining her individuality. After death, the individual continues to exist as a set of images and expectations, rather than as an individual. Agnes rebels against the expectations of her culture in order to regain her identity. The immortality of the text keeps the author alive, however, this life belongs to, and is determined by, the audience. The narrator of the text expresses and simultaneously dismantles the structures to which he belongs. There is a consequent loss of closure. Both the individual and the text are only a part of a larger whole; they are insignificant and immortal only through the most recent interpretive act.

The story opens with the narrator's perception of Agnes as she leaves a swimming pool: "it was the charm of a gesture drowning in the charmlessness of the body."[69] The gesture, Kundera decides, tells him of her character, and he gives her a name – Agnes. A mature lady, the gesture is that of a young woman. Through it, she is separated from time. She becomes timeless. The narrator is moved, "The essence of her charm, independent of

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[69] Kundera 3.

time, revealed itself for a second in that gesture and dazzled me."[70] He begins to create her identity, but upon further consideration, he decides that this is impossible: "there are far fewer gestures in the world than there are individuals. That finding leads us to a shocking conclusion: a gesture is more individual than an individual."[71] He decides that "The gesture revealed nothing of that woman's essence, one could rather say that the woman revealed to me the charm of the gesture."[72] The narrator's initial reaction to this woman, in retrospect, is inaccurate. He begins his story through a character who waves to a lifeguard. The next day, however, this specific wave is recognized to belong not to her, but to the world. The author of her character, in returning to her the day after her birth, finds that she does not possess the gesture. Rather, she belongs to it. She also belongs to the narrator, who introduces himself as Milan Kundera, the author. Milan Kundera insists on eliminating the distance between author and narrator. The author's return to his text after an absence is very much like that of any other reader. The text does not continue to conform to the author's intentions upon its release to the public. Immortality seems to belong to itself, and Kundera, as both author and narrator, accompanies the text indefinitely.

Agnes' journey begins with the concept of authority through her speculation of God: "the Creator loaded a detailed program into the computer and went away."[73] She

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[70] Kundera 4.

[71] Kundera 7.

[72] Kundera 7.

[73] Kundera 11.

distinguishes between the traditional God and the timeless God, and she recognizes that tradition and history are both being challenged by the crowd: "That God created the world and then left it to a forsaken humanity trying to address him in an echoless void – this idea isn't new. Yet it is one thing to be abandoned by the God of our forefathers and another to be abandoned by God the inventor of a cosmic computer."[74] Not only has God abandoned us, however, but we have further abandoned him through our abandonment of his teachings. He is forgotten, and He has forgotten us. Even the Ten Commandments "have been virtually forgotten!"[75] The morals of the culture are consequently destabilized. The structure, which has upheld the culture, is no longer secure. God and humanity have separated, and the individual cannot help but become absorbed into the crowd.

This crowd is a collective of individuals who have lost their individuality. The crowd's devices have distorted both God and the church. It is the continued progression of urban life, of machines over nature, that has led to the de-structuring of the established roles and conventions of society. Avenarius tells our narrator, Kundera, that the "church of Saint-Germain-des-Pres has disappeared and all the churches in towns have disappeared in the same way, like the moon when it enters an eclipse."[76] These churches are seen only through the furtive glances necessary to navigate through the crowds of people and cars. The culture is established through its external expression of faith, but this faith has been absorbed within a culture that is unaware of its existence:

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[74] Kundera 11.

[75] Kundera 111.

[76] Kundera 243.

> I counted how many times I was able to look at the church without being bumped into by a hurrying passerby or nearly run over by a car. I counted seven very short glances, which cost me a bruised left arm because an impatient young man struck me with his elbow. I was allowed an eighth glance when I stopped in front of the church door and lifted my head. But I only saw the facade, in a highly distorted fisheye perspective. From such fleeting and deformed views my mind had put together some sort of rough representation that has no more in common with that church than Laura does with my drawing of two arrows.[77]

The culture belongs to its vehicles, its people, and its present. No longer does the European culture depend on the authority of God, and no longer can the author create and control the interpretation of his text. The individual who is lost in the crowd is also lost to his authority. The individual must discover his identity on his own.

The destabilization of authority results in a destabilization of the self. The individual becomes lost in the crowd. Agnes, however, chooses to reunite with her self and abandons the crowd, which necessarily involves an abandonment of her social and cultural roles, including that of mother and wife. The contemporary individual, Kundera tells us, exists as a "harmonious combination of uniformity and freedom."[78] Agnes rebels against the uniformity of her existence through her rejection of her cultural role – her abandonment of her husband and her daughter for a life of solitude in Switzerland. Paul

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[77] Kundera 243.

[78] Kundera 6.

recognizes that "As long as we live with other people, we are what other people consider us to be. Thinking about how others see us and trying to make our image as attractive as possible is considered a kind of dissembling or cheating. But does there exist another kind of direct contact between myself and their selves except through the mediation of the eyes?"[79] Agnes' recognition of this state of being leads her to abandon her place in the crowd for her self. She is tired of being watched, she "subtracts from her self everything that is exterior and borrowed, in order to come closer to her sheer essence."[80] Her character rejects her external life in order to examine her internal life. As John O'Brien (1999) says, she resists the dominant cultural roles, and she resents representational strategies.[81] Her impression of the photograph is a negative one: " it means that an individual no longer belongs to himself but becomes the property of others."[82] Agnes' internal self is uncomfortably confined because of the cultural and representational restraints that are very present in contemporary society. She leaves for Switzerland, finding comfort through what John O'Brien calls its "geopolitical detachment."[83]

The treatment of Agnes is that of both a determined being and a fictional character; Kundera treats her as though she exists both within and external to his

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[79] Kundera 127.

[80] Kundera 100.

[81] O'Brien, John, "Seeing through the Opposition: Kundera, Deconstruction, and Feminism: *Immortality*," Critical Essays on Milan Kundera, ed. Peter Petro (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1999) 224.

[82] Kundera 32.

[83] O'Brien 224.

imagination. He defines her, but she already exists. And while her existence is not unlike that of the other characters, she is the one to make the existential choice. She rejects what remains of her culture through her actions, while Paul discusses the problems of the postmodern culture with his associates. His conversations and external dialogue provide the verbal narrative to Agnes' internal conflict. He also provides an accurate explanation of the self's image that is applicable and useful to the understanding of the loss of authority in postmodern literature:

> It's naive to believe that our image is a mere illusion, ungraspable, indescribable, misty, while the only reality, all too easily graspable and describable, is our image in the eyes of others. And the worst thing about it is that you are not its master. First you try to paint it yourself, then you want at least to influence and control it, but in vain: a single malicious phrase is enough to change you forever into a depressingly simple caricature.[84]

Like Paul's understanding of the self and its existence in the world as it is perceived by others, the text belongs to the world, and neither the self not the text can sustain the control of the crowd. Both author and self are subject to the postmodern, which has reappropriated the traditional cultural and religious expectations. These expectations do still exist, yet the contemporary world denies them the significance through which they were initially established. The individual is consequently still attached to tradition through his acknowledgement of the past, but the tradition becomes less important to his

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[84] Kundera 127.

routine existence. The loss of morality in the world undeniably affects the individual who lives in the world. Thus, traditional behaviours are less and less prevalent, and the individual becomes more and more 'postmodern'.

The love affair of Goethe and Bettina is discussed at length in Immortality. These characters are immortal through their existence in the letters, published in 1835, *Goethes Briefwechselmit einem Kinde*, which translates as "Goethe's Correspondence with a Child." These letters are published and released to the public, and form the characters for the reading public. The letters maintain the public's conception and understanding of Goethe and Bettina's love affair until the original letters are retrieved in 1920. Bettina's need to change not only the tone but the dates and words themselves of the letters, and not only of Goethe's but also of her own, is a comment upon the inability to achieve closure in the text – the text changes as do her perceptions and experiences, and as does the world. She reclaims the proof of their correspondence, and she is disappointed:

> her whole story with Goethe seemed a mere sketch, perhaps a sketch for a masterpiece but a sketch all the same, and a very imperfect one at that. It was necessary to set to work. For three years she kept correcting, rewriting, adding. Dissatisfied as she was with her own letters, those from Goethe pleased her even less. When now she reread them she was offended by their brevity, their reserve, and even, at times, their impertinence. At times he wrote to her as if he took her childlike mask literally, as if he were bestowing mildly indulgent lessons on a schoolgirl.

That's why she now had to change their tone.[85]

She alters the letters and creates, through a process of refinement, a passionate and rewarding relationship. This published relationship immortalizes both Goethe and herself. Yet neither are truly themselves in their immortality. They belong to the public, and they exist through the public. The publication of the original letters in 1920 further immortalises the pair through its controversy. Once again, they become immortalized through the public's collection of their information, rather than through their own identities.

Agnes considers Laura's threat of suicide as a means of reaching immortality. Agnes considers suicide to be an action that destabilizes the pre-established understanding of this action. It is not a way to escape, but "a way *to stay*. To stay with him. To stay with us. To engrave herself forever on all our memories. To force her body into our lives. To crush us."[86] She is determined to reject convention and to re-establish an understanding of self. Her desire to know herself manifest itself through a consistent questioning and destabilization of the structures that uphold society. Her struggle to find herself breaks down the culture into which she has become absorbed. She recognizes the issues that provoke conventional behaviour, and she disregards this conventional behaviour. Agnes begins to recognize that every event is insignificant, yet each event can lead to a series of also insignificant events that carry the potential to influence another event in another time. Laura's death would only make her immortal. Her desire for

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[85] Kundera 73-74.

[86] Kundera 176.

attention provokes a desire to die and remain in the minds of those with whom she is close for eternity. In the postmodern world, even death fails to provide closure.

The gesture from which Immortality is born is decidedly misrepresentational though its impersonal association with the individual. Agnes rebels from her culture to return to her self. This behaviour results from the lack of authority in contemporary society. Glicksberg (1963) presents a concept that encapsulates Agnes' situation; the death of God results in a "spiritually homeless self. Man today is aware that his existence in an incomprehensible universe, whether mechanistic or simply 'absurd,' and mass society leave no room for the affirmation of his identity."[87] The individual, in order to find himself, must remove himself from the structures in which he lives.

"Literature will die out, and stupid poetic phrases will remain to drift over the world."[88] Kundera comments on the state of the world and the constant removal of established expression. Religious experience has been lost, authorial voice must be re-asserted in order to be heard, the individual no longer belongs to himself, and finality does not exist. The stupid poetic phrases will serve to define emotions and states of being. The creative identity is lost and can only be retrieved through a negation of convention and an affirmation of the self through a death of the public self. Cultural distinctions are consequently lost through the postmodern individual's search for self in a world where he consistently finds an absence of meaning.

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[87] Glicksberg, Charles I, The Self in Modern Literature (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 1963) 182.

[88] Kundera 339.

II.8

The Roots of Boyhood

Coetzee's Boyhood (1997) tells the story of a boy growing up in South Africa. His introspection reveals that even a child's identity is subject to postmodern self-examination. The religious and racial distinctions of his culture are as deeply affective to his identity as is his immediate authority. John considers his mother, his younger brother, and his father through his self-investigation. His attempts to unify his self with the rest of the world serve only to further distinguish between his ideals and the expectations to which he fails to conform. His character presents, through his rebelliousness, the postmodern youth, affected by a lack of authority, uncertain of his own identity, and unable to find not only meaning but also closure in the world.

The autobiographical nature of the text, and the separation of author, narrator, and character by age alone, suggests that the authority of the text is as much the present as the past. In this sense, the text not only exists as it is written by the author but also as it is read by the audience. The author's return to his boyhood through a narratorial device such as is here employed confirms that he can no longer be what he is writing. He has been changed by time, and he preserves his objectivity in his recollection of the past, as a comment on his past. He uses a third-person narration because he no longer is the boy whose story he now tells.

Boyhood tells the story of a boy whose authority is de-structured through the

matriarchal authority that he experiences at home and the religious authority prevalent in the society to which he belongs. Not only has the paternal authority been replaced in his home, but he also experiences a lack of religiosity, which eventually affects him to the extent that he guesses a religion rather than admit to have none. His identity becomes split; he is unable to coordinate his internal self with his external self: "At home he is an irascible despot, at school a lamb, meek and mild."[89] The objectivity of the autobiography suggests that finality cannot exist. The individual exists in a constant state of self-questioning that does not belong to a particular age or experience, but is distinct of the postmodern individual who lives through the structures that he can no longer uphold but can also not ignore.

> He has never worked out the position of his father in the household. In fact, it is not obvious to him by what right his father is there at all. In a normal household, he is prepared to accept, the father stands at the head: the house belongs to him, the wife and children live under his sway. But in their own case, and in the households of his mother's two sisters as well, it is the mother and children who make up the core, while the husband is no more than an appendage, a contributor to the economy as a paying lodger might be.[90]

The destabilization of traditional authority through his mother's dominance and control increases John's self-awareness and further distinguishes him, if only to himself, as

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[89] Coetzee, J. M., Boyhood (London: Vintage, 1997) 13.

[90] Coetzee 12.

abnormal. His mother's position in the family differs from the cultural norm in a way that John both resents and embraces. He sees himself as different on account of his relationship with his mother, but he also recognizes that it could be much worse: "He knows that his father sides with his family against him. This is one of his father's ways of getting back at his mother. He is chilled by the thought of the life he would face if his father ran the household, a life of dull, stupid formulas, of being like everyone else. His mother is the only one who stands between him and an existence he could not endure."[91] While he sees himself as different from his peers, he appreciates that his experiences are unique. He values his ability to separate himself from the crowd and to perceive the world through a less subjective perspective. This postmodern ability is made available to him on account of his mother's rejection of the traditional patriarchal household.

An absence of religious authority in John's life also serves to destabilize the cultural norm. John's understanding of religion comes only from what he observes impartially. He is subject not to religious teachings themselves but to the effects of these teachings. He pretends to be Roman Catholic, because he is afraid to admit that he is nothing: "The great secret of his school life, the secret he tells no one at home, is that he has become a Roman Catholic, that for all practical purposes he 'is' a Roman Catholic."[92] It is through his observations of the individuals who do belong to religious groups that he gains a proper understanding of what religion does: "If being a Christian means singing hymns and listening to sermons and then coming out to torment the Jews, he has no wish

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[91] Coetzee 79.

[92] Coetzee 18.

to be a Christian."[93] His perceptions of religious indoctrination and behaviour are completely unbiased and inquisitive. He separates himself from and observes the crowd.

Upon his family's move to Cape Town, John is sent to the only school that caters to his economic class, St. Joseph's. And it is in the lay teacher Mr. Whelan's class that John feels most restrained: "His resistence to Mr Whelan's Scripture lessons runs deep. He is sure that Mr Whelan has no idea of what Jesus' parables really mean. Though he himself is an atheist and has always been one, he feels he understands Jesus better than Mr Whelan does."[94] The religious and academic authorities provide very little reassurance for John. He questions himself through his interpretations of and interactions with these authorities, and he continues to focus on his own identity.

The identity of the boy, which is being questioned through the narrator, is split into an internal and an external self. John questions himself through his present self and his past self. The story is about his internal struggle to find himself, as he exists in a world that has traditional values and norms, but to which he and his family do not fully conform. John often feels inadequate: "He has a sense that he is damaged. He has a sense that something is slowly tearing inside him all the time: a wall, a membrane. He tried to hold himself as tight as possible to keep the tearing within bounds, not to stop it: nothing will stop it."[95] He finds peace at *Voelfontein*, Bird-Fountain, his father's family farm. He

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[93] Coetzee 24.

[94] Coetzee 142.

[95] Coetzee 9.

roots himself in the farm: "I belong to the farm."[96] He feels that it is through *Voelfontein* and his mother's family farm that he exists: "Through the farms he is rooted in the past; through the farms he has substance."[97] In his search for his identity, John finds that he identifies with his parents' pasts more than he does with his own present.

His internal world is different from the external world, which he admits to seeing only on occasion:

> Sometimes the gloom lifts. The sky, that usually sits tight and closed over his head, not so near that it can be touched but not much further either, opens a slit, and for an interval he can see the world as it really is. He sees himself in his white shirt with rolled-up sleeves and the grey short trousers that he is on the point of outgrowing: not a child, not what a passer-by would call a child, too big for that now, too big to use that excuse, yet still as stupid and self-enclosed as a child: childish; dumb; ignorant; retarded. In a moment like this he can see his father and his mother too, from above, without anger; not as two grey and formless weights seating themselves on his shoulders, plotting his misery day and night, but as a man and a woman living dull and trouble-filled lives of their own. The sky opens, he sees the world as it is, then the sky closes and he is himself again, living the only story he will admit, the story of himself.[98]

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[96] Coetzee 96.

[97] Coetzee 22.

[98] Coetzee 160-61.

Yet he is clearly aware of its existence. He acknowledges that he is engrossed within his self and his search for his self. It is through this preoccupation that the external world becomes less important and less immediate. He is searching for meaning within his self, and this is due to the absence of authority in the postmodern world. While his family recognizes the established conventions of their culture, they are able to live distinctly, and without regard for these established conventions. John, too, is able to see where he differs from his peers, while he continues to behave in an internal and individualized way.

John confesses that in Worcester, going to school filled him with both apprehension and excitement, but in Cape Town, going to school makes him feel like he is wasting his time:

> It is a shrunken little world, a more or less benign prison in which he might as well be weaving baskets as going through the classroom routine. Cape Town is not making him cleverer, it is making him stupider. The realization causes panic to well up in him. Whoever he truly is, whoever the true 'I' is that ought to be rising out of the ashes of his childhood, is not being allowed to be born, is being kept puny and stunted.[99]

He becomes disenchanted with childhood. John hopes to establish himself as an individual, but he is unable to reconcile his external self with his internal self. Rather than feel encouraged, he feels restrained by his external activities, and he does not know what to do on his own. He rejects the crowd, but he cannot escape simply because he is further restrained by his youth. He seeks independence, yet he simultaneously looks for help: "At

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[99] Coetzee 130-140

the age of thirteen he is becoming surly, scowling, dark. He does not like this new, ugly self, he wants to be drawn out of it, but that is something he cannot do by himself. Yet who is there who will do it for him?"[100]

John is unable to find any concrete answers or absolute truths. He exists in a constant state of self-questioning and discomfort. He has no religious or traditional authority, and he consequently finds himself lost in his search for self. He questions the impermanence of self and his own existence: "He can imagine himself dying but he cannot imagine himself disappearing. Try as he will, he cannot annihilate the last residue of himself."[101] He knows that he is alive, but he does not yet know for what purpose. He knows his story, but what about the stories of others? Do they disappear when they die? The death of his Aunt Annie allows him the opportunity to observe the manner in which her possessions are removed not only from the family but also from history. He asks his mother what will happen to his great-grandfather's book, *Deur 'n gevaarlike krankheid tot ewige genesing*:

> His mother does not know or will not say. From the flat where she broke her hip to the hospital to the old age home in Stikland to Woltemade no. 3 no one has given a thought to the books except perhaps Aunt Annie herself, the books that no one will ever read; and now Aunt Annie is lying in the rain waiting for someone to find the time to bury her. He alone is left to do the thinking. How will he keep them all in his head, all the

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[100] Coetzee 151-52.

[101] Coetzee 112.

books, all the people, all the stories? And if he does not remember them, who will?"[102]

Through the narrator, the author re-tells his own boyhood with a glass wall of objectivity and maturity. It can be retold no other way – experience changes perception. It is the author's story and it is the author's past, but the only interpretation is that of the present. Each story can be retold and re-interpreted, while the events remain the same. What is of importance is perception and appropriation: "they roam around talking about things that the grown-ups would shake their heads over: whether the universe had a beginning; what lies beyond Pluto, the dark planet; where God is, if he exists."[103] These questions are new and the possibilities are endless, but the answers, as the adults know, are absent. There is no absolute meaning, neither in the self nor the story. The only meaning is the meaning that the present interprets.

The postmodern investigation extends beyond the modern search for meaning. The postmodern man, or child, seeks self-meaning. He has acknowledged that there is no meaning in the world, and he must now come to terms with the fact that he himself has no meaning. He is alive, he lives through what is established, perhaps failing to conform to the established, and then he dies. He is forgotten, unless he has done something incredible, in which case he will be remembered after his death, but only for doing whatever he did that was incredible. Authority is no longer a presence, and the self becomes lost in the contemporary crowd. Meaning becomes less and less apparent and

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[102] Coetzee 166.

[103] Coetzee 95.

closure ceases to exist. The child is no longer distinctly South African; while his surname is Afrikaans, he speaks English at home, and: "There is a manner that Afrikaners have in common too – a surliness, an intransigence, and, not far behind it, a threat of physical force [...] that he does not share and in fact shrinks from."[104] He is not Afrikaner, nor English. He is not a child, nor is he an adult. He tries to find himself, but all that he finds is what he is not, and he must consequently define himself through his opposites, through what he is not, and that is how he must exist.

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[104] Coetzee 124.

II.9

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle and the Inversion of Reality

Murakami's The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle (1997) is the story of a man's search for his wife in his own unconscious. The novel is clearly Japanese, yet it is also arguably Western. Murakami's style of writing is simple and direct: "Absent is much of the mysterious ambiguity that has come to be associated with other Japanese authors who have come to be known outside of Japan."[105] Toru Okada's search for self is representative of his present time, rather than of his geographic place. While he clearly belongs to a Japanese society, the indications of his society are not essential to any event or discovery within the text. External landscape and routine are indicative of the culture, but Toru's search takes place primarily within himself. This search is not common to Japanese fiction but to postmodern fiction. Politically, the novel reacts against the State, as is common to contemporary literature. Thus, while cultural specifics are undeniably present in the text, they are less influential to the events within the text than is the postmodern state of the individual.

It is through the contemporary loss of authority that the postmodern man comes to lose his self. Toru Okada is temporarily and self-decidedly unemployed. He has no contact with his living parent, and he has no children. He lives with his wife, and has no circle of friends. He is in a position where authority is entirely absent. The lack of

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[105] Strecher, Matthew, Haruki Murakami's *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* (New York: Continuum, 2002) 12.

immediate authority in Toru Okada's life results in a loss of self. Kumiko, his wife, leaves him suddenly, and he begins to understand that he has also lost a part of his self. His only means of understanding his place in the world is to physically separate himself from the world. He uses a dried-up well to confront his unconscious in the hopes of finding both his lost identity and the unknown identity of his wife. The contemporary loss of authority results not only in a loss of self, but also in a loss of recognition of others. Man becomes so engrossed in his search for meaning and for self that he consequently loses his own sense of the reality to which he belongs, both the society and his social role. His self-search includes an absorption into the mind in a personal and individual way, which excludes all other beings. He is able to observe the crowd without taking part in its activities.

"I pointed out that I was presently unemployed, that I was free all day, and that I could see him at his convenience, be it morning, noon, afternoon, or whenever."[106] Toru Okada is free. He has shaken the structure to which he had become accustomed, and to which he had served to uphold. He has decided to do what he wants to do, but he must first discover what this is. He de-structures his life through his decision to quit his job. The cultural norm is destabilized; his norm is destabilized. Traditional practices emphasize the man's role in the workforce, and the inversion of this practice is a postmodern event. The very traditional and stereotypical gender roles are clearly inverted in the first part of the text:

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[106] Murakami, Haruki, The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, trans. Jay Rubin (New York: Vintage International, 1997) 126.

> One morning after Kumiko rushed through breakfast and left for work, I threw laundry into the washing machine, made the bed, washed the dishes, and vacuumed. Then, with the cat beside me, I sat on the veranda, checking the want ads and the sales. At noon I had lunch and went to the supermarket. There I bought food for dinner and, from a sale table, bought detergent, tissues, and toilet paper. At home again, I made preparations for dinner and lay down on the sofa with a book, waiting for Kumiko to come home.[107]

Toru is able to escape the confines of authority through a destabilization of certain traditional roles. What existed as the only authoritative figure in Toru's life becomes absent through his unemployment. There is no religious authority, no parental authority, and no civil authority.

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle makes no reference to or incorporation of religious practice or belief. Japanese tradition holds that the soul resides in the belly, as is expressed in the novel. While certain God-like attributes, such as destiny controlling powers, are suggested through the wind-up bird, there is a distinct absence of religious authority in the text. Toru's disregard for traditional religiosity is representational of the typical postmodern individual, who deals with his life through his own internal contemplation. There is an absence of prayer and a preoccupation with self. God is dead, after all. It is through a lack of traditional authority that traditional roles can be inverted. This inversion often displaces the individual – while he is aware of the norms, he is also

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[107] Murakami 24.

aware that he is not acting in conformance with them. He is a part of the crowd, yet he learns to separate himself from it and to observe it objectively:

> I repeated the routine every day, as I had done the previous summer, boarding the train for the city just after ten, sitting on the bench in the plaza by the high-rise, and looking at the people passing back and forth all day, without a thought in my head. Now and then, the real sounds around me would grow distant and fade away. The only thing I heard at those times was the deep, quiet sound of water flowing.[108]

He has realized his postmodern state, and he can separate himself from the crowd to which he belongs through introspective contemplation. It is through this contemplation that he hopes to find his own identity, as well as that of Kumiko.

Toru Okada loses a part of his self, of his identity, when he loses his wife. The loss of Kumiko provokes Toru into an intense quest in his subconscious to discover why she has disappeared. He must discover her true identity, as well as his own, in order to understand the events of his own life. Toru no longer understands who he is. His life has been de-structured, and he alone is left to make sense of what it was, and what it now is: "And soon the thought crossed my mind that my failure to develop an appetite might be owing to the lack within me of some kind of literary reality. I felt as if I had become part of a badly written novel, that someone was taking me to task for being utterly unreal. And perhaps it was true."[109] Toru's own sense of self becomes as foreign to him as is Kumiko.

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[108] Murakami 353-54.

[109] Murakami 181.

His only way to find Kumiko, he believes, is through an intense journey into his own subconscious.

Kumiko's character is introduced and explored through Toru's knowledge of and experiences with her. Her character remains distant throughout the story. Toru knows Kumiko to be fairly reserved, hard working, honest, and, aside from her life with him, sexually inexperienced. He is shocked to find that she has left him, and he is shocked to learn that she has been having an affair. Toru realizes that there is much to Kumiko that he does not know, and through this realization he also comes to realize that there is much to himself that he does not know. His search for Kumiko leads him into an even deeper search for himself. The most hidden aspects of Kumiko's identity, however, are presented to Toru through the host of female characters who enter, briefly yet forcefully, into his life. The mysterious telephone woman represents the sexual Kumiko, unknown to Toru. Kumiko uses the telephone to present her dark and sexual side to Toru. It is her way of telling him about her secret self, the self that she has just come to recognize as a living part of herself. It is this self that forces her to leave Toru. On the telephone, she asks him for ten minutes, for them to understand each other's feelings: "Ten minutes please. That's all we need to understand each other."[110] This self is highly sexual and is hungry for physical love.

Kumiko's character is both negated and affirmed through the character of Creta Kano, who simultaneously shares attributes with and presents the opposite of Kumiko. On several occasions, Toru's unconscious confuses the two women:

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[110] Murakami 5.

> Several times the illusion overtook me that I was doing this with Kumiko, not Creta Kano. I was sure I would wake up the moment I came. But I did not wake up. I came inside her. It was reality. True reality. But each time I recognized that fact, reality felt a little less real. Reality was coming undone and moving away from reality, one small step at a time. But still, it was reality.[111]

Creta Kano provides some comfort to Toru, both psychologically and physically. She does not replace Kumiko, but she somehow links Toru with her in his own subconscious. Creta Kano's character explores the possible multiplicity of Kumiko's identity. In the end, Kumiko's self-understanding remains uncertain: "Is the answer really so simple? And if so, what, then, is the real me? Do I have any sound basis for concluding that the me who is now writing this letter is the 'real me'? I was never able to believe that firmly in my 'self,' nor am I able to today."[112]

The novel, with no figures of authority and no complete sense of self, also provides no closure or finality. Kumiko has not returned, and her return is uncertain. The characters with whom Toru identifies throughout the novel all disappear as suddenly as they appeared. Their stories told, and their influences made, they cease to exist. Toru's acquaintanceships with each of these characters provides him with insight into both himself and Kumiko. These characters exist solely for the purpose of helping Toru in his search. Through the destabilization of his established structures, Toru loses his sense of

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[111] Murakami 313.

[112] Murakami 602.

self and of reality. It is through a host of unique characters that Toru is able to escape from the crowd to within his self. Still, he finds no concrete answers: " 'Well, finally, the events I've been through have been tremendously complicated. All kinds of characters have come on the scene, and strange things have happened one after another, to the point where, if I try to think about them in order, I lose track. Viewed at more of a distance thought, the thread running through them is perfectly clear [...]'"[113] Toru senses the story that is built around his search, but the story is unfinished.

The novel closes with Kumiko's note to Toru, and the only hint at their future: "I have run out of time. The taxi is waiting for me outside. I have to leave for the hospital now, to kill my brother and take my punishment. Strange, I no longer hate my brother. I am calm with the thought that I will have to obliterate his life from this world. I have to do it for his sake too. And to give my own life meaning."[114] Kumiko's calmness borders on lunacy, and her resolve to kill her brother implies possible future action on the part of the civil authorities. Kumiko speaks freely with Toru, but she does not speak of returning to him. His search for her finds only more questions and never any answers. The novel ends shortly, with Toru finding solace, again, in his solitary sleep: "I closed my eyes and tried to sleep. But it was not until much later that I was able to get any real sleep. In a place far away from anyone or anywhere, I drifted off for a moment."[115]

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle tells the story of a man who, free of all forms of

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[113] Murakami 577.

[114] Murakami 603.

[115] Murakami 607.

authority, becomes entangled in the search for his own identity and for that of his wife. He must separate himself from the world in order to regain a sense of his place and role within the world. Toru's self-exploration examines the many forms of his wife that exist in other women. He comes to the realization that each event exists only in correlation with another event. No closure can be reached, because there is always another possible event. Toru learns through reading Nutmeg's "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicles" that events exist through many different forms:

> I could not be certain of this, however. Nutmeg might possibly have known that I was called 'wind-up bird.' The words might have affected her story (or, rather, *their* story), might have eaten their way into it on an unconscious level. The story jointly possessed by mother and son might not exist in a single fixed form but could go on taking in changes and growing as a story does in oral transmission.[116]

His story also exists through not one fixed form but through the influences of his experiences and of those who approach his story.

He destabilizes the cultural structures and performs an internal search for truth of self and for personal meaning. The disappearance of his wife can be dealt with only through his complete separation from the reality of the external world. He is the postmodern individual. He is a part of the crowd, yet he is distinct in his ability to separate himself from the crowd and to regard it objectively. This separation provides the individual with a sense of self that is inevitably lost to the crowd. Toru hides himself to

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[116] Murakami 525.

the world and to his subconscious in his search for Kumiko: "I tried to keep my breath from agitating the surrounding air. *I am not here*, I told myself. I am not here. I am not anywhere."[117] He has lost his identity, he has no figure of authority to whom he must answer and closure is unattainable. Toru becomes, through the loss of authority, the loss of self, and the loss of closure, the typical postmodern man.

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[117] Murakami 583.

Conclusion

Man's confrontation with his own insignificance is clearly presented in postmodern literature. Through an examination of five novels from five continents, we have seen that the characters are not fully developed and seek permanence not only in society but, also, within themselves. They are born into the text, but their identities are incomplete. Part formed, the internal self and the external self remain separate. Internal ideals and external obligations keep these characters from becoming a part of society, which they recognize as having no purpose. They face the existential situation. They have to. They are alone. They may play a part in society's establishment, but they see that it is just that: a part. They find themselves apart from society. The structure of the society is destabilized through the individual's recognition that he is playing a part and that he has lost himself.

It is through an examination of theological and theoretical discussion that the postmodern identity can be dissected. Theists and atheists alike discuss the question of God and Christendom, and certainly many agree on one thing: God is dead. The theme of the death of the author is somewhat less popular, however, it is equally as important to the theoretical analysis of textual material. By providing essential background information to the themes of the death of God and the death of the author, the relationship between the individual and the contemporary world, both in reality and in literature, can be discussed. We can recognize our own dilemmas through the fictional character, and we can begin to understand who we are and what we are doing.

Kierkegaard's Christian-based concern with Christendom begins the analysis subjectively. He attacks neither God nor the Christian teachings. Rather, he finds a problem with the appropriation of both God and the Christian teachings by the public. His own personal experiences play heavily on his perceptions, and he feels that the state of Christendom is, essentially, doomed. Kierkegaard is very useful as an introduction to the theological background of the the theme of the death of God. He is widely recognized, and his three levels of existence are contemporarily accurate. The leap of faith describes the intensity of reaching God and reminds how essential subjectivity is in worship. Nietzsche's prophetic tale, "The Madman," takes Kierkegaard's concerns to an apex. Not only are those who worship God doing so falsely, but they have also disregarded him to an extent that he has died. Nietzsche's madman does not stop there, however, because not only has God died, but we have killed him. "God is dead" is the slogan for the 21st Century. This is immediate, and this is our fault. Nietzsche builds from Kierkegaard's concern and shouts to the world that they've done wrong.

Altizer takes what Kierkegaard and Nietzsche have established, and he adapts it to contemporary Christianity. The past has passed, but it has left its mark. What we must now do is accept that God did exist. He existed in our time, and he died in our time. Now, we must move forward with the knowledge that God was here, but he died. Traditional Christianity has lost meaning, but it can continue as a religion with this acknowledgement. God is present in his absence. He must be denied in order to exist.

The death of the author in contemporary literature leads to an absence of meaning. Meaning has been lost in religion and in fiction. The author cannot be denied because

someone had to write the text, but the author's continued attachment to the text is forcefully denied in deconstruction. Through an understanding of Derrida and Barthes, a connection between the themes of the death of God and the death of the author can be made, and this connection provides a solid explanation for the state of the individual in the contemporary world. The presence of both God and the author is now an absence, and the individuals and the characters are left to deal with their selves and the world, both of which are recognized to be meaningless. Tradition can no longer define the present. The present must define the present. The past exists, but it is the past. The chain of signification is continually in motion, and it can only be appropriated temporarily. The non-referentiality of language and the absence of meaning prevent closure in the text and in the world. The cycle is in continuous motion, and it exists for every present but never beyond that.

Taylor connects the theological and theoretical issues through his attempt to create a Christology, which, like Altizer's radical Christianity, will allow for Christianity to continue in an adapted form. He links the religious with the literary, and he facilitates the explication of the issue through the relationship between the two. By providing such a close connection between the fictional and the real, and vice versa, Taylor gives the individual the objectivity that is necessary for understanding the issue. He encourages a reinterpretation of Christianity through deconstruction. This Christology implements the interplay of presence and absence, as presented in deconstruction. This allows for religious aspects that could have been forgotten with God's death to be given a renewed relevance within the belief. Taylor, like Altizer, suggests an acceptance of and

progression from the death of God.

God is gone. This modern realization exists cross-culturally. Traditional authority is no longer present. Established conventions continue to exist, but they are slowly being dismantled by the public's recognition of the meaninglessness of these conventions and of their own insignificance. Is there truth in the world? Is there truth is the self? The characters portrayed in the texts are uncertain of the world and of themselves, and they attempt to separate themselves from the crowd to gain a perspective of the world that is their own. It is through this separation from the crowd that they destabilize their culture's structures and distinguish themselves as postmodern individuals. The postmodern individual knows that he is alone, and he knows that there is no meaning. He faces this fact, and he renounces the things that appear to matter. He must try to define himself, for himself, by himself.

Garcia Marques clearly presents the loss of authority in a South American society. His novella depicts an event that can be stopped by the authorities, but they prove absent in their authority. Not only are the religious and civil authorities absent in their duties, but the remaining characters fail to act as their descriptions suggest. There is a general breakdown in the societal conventions, and it is for this reason that Santiago Nasar is killed. The Vicario brothers go unstopped due to the instability of authority. The text itself also has a lack of authority, as is apparent by its lack of closure. Kosinski's novel provides no closure either. While three of the characters just evaporate from Domostroy's life, he is left to perhaps play again, perhaps drive his car, and perhaps play music, but nothing is certain. We are left with question marks? We have read the novels, but we are

no closer to knowing the characters. Kundera attempts to provide us with a character, but he loses her to her life. He inserts himself in the text, as narrator and character, to give himself permanence within a work that will lose him when it leaves him. He is lost in the text too because it is Agnes' life, and he can only suppose and postulate. As much as he would like to be her creator, he realizes very early on that he can only do so much. Coetzee also inserts himself in varying levels within his text. He is character and narrator, as well as author. He implicates himself into the novel, however, it is in an attempt to re-live, re-tell, and re-evaluate his childhood, which is established through unconventional standards. His home life is different from that of those around him, and this makes him feel more isolated, rather than more free. Murakami also presents a character whose supposed freedom brings him only discomfort. Toru has zero obligations, but he is more and more lost to himself, and the world is more and more lost to him. The more time he is given to think about society's roles, the more he understands them to be meaningless. Here, too, we are left with no closure. Toru's quest continues, as we, as readers, are only momentary appendages to the life of the novel.

The textual analysis was undertaken through the perceptions of traditional Western society with an understanding of and an expectation for the Christian God's presence. The issues have been considered within and related to a male-oriented and patriarchal frame of mind. As a result, the novels have been analysed as they are received in the Western world. Three of the five texts are studied through their English translations, and each text is treated as it occurs through its present reading. Cultural structures are destabilized and cross-cultural postmodern characteristics are established.

What results most forcefully from this analysis is the individualism that has come to characterize contemporary Western society. We have questioned our authority through an absent God and a lost self, and now we immerse ourselves within ourselves. Political apathy has resulted from postmodern individualism, and it is a highly apparent and often discussed dilemma. While I see political apathy as a result of the loss of self, Kundera may not agree: "'The more indifferent people are to politics, to the interests of others, the more obsessed they become with their own faces. The individualism of our time.' "[118] The other, and perhaps more frightening and destructive, result of the loss of authority is its replacement by commercialism and financial gain. Are we further ahead to each live in solitary contemplation, recognizing the meaningless of the world, or it is better to be goal-oriented and preoccupied with financial success?

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[118] Kundera 32.

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